

In the Wasp's Nest



Cyrus Townsend Dray

BERTLAND SMITH
AC-13 OF 50013
240 Long Beach Blvd.
Long Beach 2, Calif.





Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

B.F.

2

IN THE WASP'S NEST

THE SCRIBNER SERIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

EACH WITH ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOR

BOOKS FOR BOYS

- THE MODERN VIKINGS By H. H. Boyesen
WILL SHAKESPEARE'S LITTLE LAD By Imogen Clark
THE BOY SCOUT and Other Stories for Boys
STORIES FOR BOYS By Richard Harding Davis
HANS BRINKER, or, The Silver Skates By Mary Mapes Dodge
THE HOOSIER SCHOOL-BOY By Edward Eggleston
THE COURT OF KING ARTHUR By William Henry Frost
WITH LEE IN VIRGINIA
WITH WOLFE IN CANADA
REDSKIN AND COWBOY By G. A. Henty
AT WAR WITH PONTIAC By Kirk Munroe
TOMMY TROT'S VISIT TO SANTA CLAUS and
A CAPTURED SANTA CLAUS By Thomas Nelson Page
BOYS OF ST. TIMOTHY'S By Arthur Stanwood Pier
KIDNAPPED
TREASURE ISLAND
BLACK ARROW By Robert Louis Stevenson
AROUND THE WORLD IN EIGHTY DAYS
A JOURNEY TO THE CENTRE OF THE EARTH
FROM THE EARTH TO THE MOON
TWENTY THOUSAND LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA
By Jules Verne
ON THE OLD KEARSAGE
IN THE WASP'S NEST By Cyrus Townsend Brady
THE BOY SETTLERS
THE BOYS OF FAIRPORT By Noah Brooks
THE CONSCRIPT OF 1813 By Erckmann-Chatrian
THE STEAM-SHOVEL MAN By Ralph D. Paine
THE MOUNTAIN DIVIDE By Frank H. Spearman
THE STRANGE GRAY CANOE By Paul G. Tomlinson
THE ADVENTURES OF A FRESHMAN By J. L. Williams
JACK HALL, or, The School Days of an American Boy
By Robert Grant

BOOKS FOR GIRLS

- SMITH COLLEGE STORIES By Josephine Daskam
THE HALLOWELL PARTNERSHIP By Katharine Holland Brown
MY WONDERFUL VISIT By Elizabeth Hill
SARAH CREWE, or, What Happened at Miss Minchin's
By Frances Hodgson Burnett
-

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS





There was a wild *melée*.

IN THE WASP'S NEST

*THE STORY OF A SEA WAIF
IN THE WAR OF 1812*

BY

CYRUS TOWNSEND BRADY

ILLUSTRATED BY

RUFUS F. ZOGBAUM



NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1921

COPYRIGHT, 1902, BY
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

Published, September, 1902



SRLF

URL

5140857

TO MY NEPHEWS

LEE ASHBROOK

AND

WILL CURRAN

PREFACE

THE boys of the service, bless them, have always played a large part in making history for the nation.

Many of Paul Jones' officers on the famous *Bon Homme Richard*, as I have remarked in "The Grip of Honor," were boys, midshipmen who took the place of lieutenants in the battle with the *Serapis*, to which Jack Lang so often alludes. Stout old Commodore Preble conducted the Tripolitan war to a successful end with what he called "a lot of school-boy captains" who had received some of their training under Truxtun, Little, and Barry in the French War, during which this story opens.

And the midshipmen, boys all, and the youngsters of the crews proved themselves worthy of the already established traditions of the service under the great leadership of the famous captains of the War of 1812, in which the main action of this story occurs. So the tradition was handed down through the years, and many books might be written about the boys in the Mexican War, in the Civil War,

PREFACE

and in the Spanish-American War. If this volume meets with the favor of my young readers, I hope to follow it with others, treating of some of the happenings in these great wars that I have alluded to.

The *Wasp* was the name of two of the most famous of our fighting cruisers, and the mysterious fate of the second always lends a tragic and romantic interest to her story. Save for the deviation explained in the note at the end of the volume, I have tried to tell the truth about her officers, her crew, her cruising, and her fighting.

And may I add that old Jack Lang, whom I love as much as any man I have ever written about, was a real character; one of the few seamen in the Navy whose names and some details of their actions have been preserved. Would there were more accounts of the gallant services of such men as he and old Reuben James, for instance! It has been a pleasure to write of him, even though I have added to the portrait fiction's touches to supplement what little I could find out about him. He did board the *Frolic* alone, too!

But enough of preface. The spirit of the *Wasp's* crew was the spirit of Manila and Santiago. But though men now fight in bigger ships with greater guns and heavier armor, they manifest no greater

PREFACE

heroism or skill, or courage, and do no greater deeds than did little Boston and old Jack Lang and sturdy Jacob Jones and gallant Blakely and the rest, whom I now have the pleasure of introducing to my readers.

C. T. B.

LAKE PLACID CLUB,
ADIRONDACKS, N. Y.,
June 27th, 1902.



CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. The <i>Boston</i> Chases a Stranger	I
II. The <i>Boston</i> Takes <i>Le Berceau</i>	10
III. The Baby on <i>Le Berceau</i>	20
IV. Jack Lang is Appointed Head Nurse	29
V. Lang and the Baby Berth with the Captain	39
VI. Committed to the Great Deep	48
VII. Billy Bowline Bears a Hand	57
VIII. The Commodore Furnishes a Goat	68
IX. Master Ned is well Sponsored	75
X. How the Crew Remembered the Baby	83
XI. The <i>Wasp</i> gets a New "Reefer"	92
XII. Fun in the Steerage	105
XIII. Ned Boston Learns the Ropes	116
XIV. The <i>Wasp</i> Loses Two of Her Men	123
XV. Boston is Severely Reprimanded	128
XVI. Ned Fights his First Great Battle	137
XVII. The <i>Wasp</i> takes the <i>Frolic</i>	148
XVIII. The <i>Wasp</i> is Captured	155
XIX. The Magnanimity of the Englishman	160

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
XX. Ned Boston Champions the United States	172
XXI. Old Friends are Met Together	181
XXII. The Little Pride of the Navy	195
XXIII. Breaking the Blockade	202
XXIV. "To Sink, Burn, and Destroy!"	212
XXV. Clearing Ship for Action	218
XXVI. An Heroic English Captain	229
XXVII. Taken by Storm	237
XXVIII. A <i>Wasp</i> Indeed	247
XXIX. Right into the Face of the Enemy	256
XXX. The <i>Wasp</i> Sinks the <i>Avon</i>	264
XXXI. Last Letters Home	271
XXXII. Run Down at Last	280
XXXIII. The End of the <i>Wasp</i>	290
XXXIV. The Castaways	302
XXXV. The <i>Brederode</i> to the Rescue	309
XXXVI. The Mystery is Solved	315

ILLUSTRATIONS 4✓

There was a wild *melée* *Frontispiece*

	FACING PAGE
The surrender of <i>Le Berceau</i>	24

Old Jack Lang stood alone on the forecastle 152

The castaways 310

IN THE WASP'S NEST

CHAPTER I

THE *BOSTON* CHASES A STRANGER

"TUMBLE up here, bullies! Lively, now!" said an officer of the watch, picking his way forward along the starboard gangway through the men of the port watch sprawling in sleeping confusion on the deck, under the lee of the boom boats and spare topmasts lashed amidships. "Mr. Blakely," he added, looking up to the top-gallant fore-castle, where a very young midshipman with all the dignity of a first command was strutting to and fro across the deck, his hand fingering the dirk or short sword hanging by his side, "oblige me by sending a man up to the tops'l yard, sir,—the best man you have in the fore-castle."

"That'll be Lang, sir," piped up the small midshipman, touching the huge cocked hat that quite overshadowed him. "Lang!" he called out.

"Ay, ay, sir!" growled a deep bass voice as the figure of a brawny sailor disengaged itself from the

IN THE WASP'S NEST

sprawling heap of men, who, in obedience to the lieutenant's summons, were already rising to their feet, while rubbing their eyes, yawning, and striving to shake off the sleepiness that still possessed them.

"Good-mornin', Mr. Blakely," said the sailor, approaching the boy. "Looks like a fine mornin' we're goin' to have, sir," he added, sweeping the sky-line in a comprehensive glance. "Was you callin' me, sir?"

There was no disrespect in the familiarity with which the seaman addressed the young midshipman, for the relation between the two was one of those pleasant associations which often subsisted between the veteran sailors of a hundred years ago and the extremely youthful midshipmen of that period, who occupied a somewhat anomalous station as officers.

Jack Lang was then fifty years old. He came originally from New Brunswick, New Jersey. When a young man he had been a privateersman in the Revolutionary War, afterward serving under Cunnyngham in the *Surprise* and *Revenge* in British seas. He had been captured with his gallant commander, but had been afterward exchanged and had reached L'Orient in time to enter on the *Bonhomme Richard* and take part in Paul Jones's famous cruise and the battle which had resulted in the capture of the *Serapis*.

After the war he had gone on several whaling cruises, but the spirit of the man-o'-war's-man in him was too strong to be resisted, and the little

THE BOSTON CHASES A STRANGER

naval war with France in 1799-1800 found him an "A. B." (able seaman) on the muster roll of the United States sloop-of-war *Boston*, Captain George Little, which was cruising in the South Atlantic about a thousand miles north of Puerto Rico in latitude $22^{\circ} 55'$ North, longitude 51° West, on the 12th of October, 1800, on the lookout for French cruisers and privateers.

Lang was a man of huge proportions, indicating great bodily strength and vigor, unusual in so old a man. His handsome face was tanned a deep, rich brown by his years of exposure to wind and weather in many seas. As he stood on the top-gallant fore-castle with folded arms—a little trick of position which he had—balancing himself easily to the slow rolling and pitching of the ship in the gentle breeze of the languid morning, he looked the very picture of the bold, skilful, veteran American sailor.

"Lang, my man," said little Blakely, throwing his chest out importantly and thrusting his hand in the bosom of his jacket, with an air which he conceived to be impressive, but which amused greatly the sailor and the officer of the deck, "shin up to the tops'l yard. I want a pair of sharp eyes there to take a look for any ships of the enemy."

"Werry good, sir," returned the old man, smiling behind his hand. "Be ye expectin' to raise some this mornin'?"

Lang's one fault was a tendency to loquacity,

IN THE WASP'S NEST

which persisted in spite of much discouragement by the officers.

"Lang!" sharply called the amused watch officer clambering up the ladder to the top-gallant fore-castle. "Bear a hand! We'll discuss your expectations later."

"Ay, ay, sir!" answered the sailor promptly, not presuming to hesitate a moment in the presence of such a reminder from the older and more experienced officer whose nearness he had not noticed.

He sprang into the weather shrouds at once. For all he was so large a man the sailor ran up the shrouds as rapidly and as easily as if they had been a pair of stairs. Swinging himself over the futtocks, he presently gained the foretopsail yard. Grasping the tye with one hand and shading his eyes with the other, he stood erect on the yard, leaning forward and peering earnestly around the stretch of gray sea.

Off in the east day was already beginning to break. Below him the ship's bell struck the two couplets which proclaimed that it was six o'clock. The sun would soon be up. He carefully searched the horizon with his keen, practiced eyes for any indication of a ship. However, the morning was as yet too little advanced for the horizon to be clear, and he could see nothing.

"It has been a long watch, Mr. Blakely," said the lieutenant of the watch, yawning sleepily. "You have seen nothing forward, I suppose?"

THE *BOSTON* CHASES A STRANGER

"Nothing, sir," answered Blakely, saluting his superior, "else I should have reported it to you at once."

"Ah, you've the making of a fine officer in you some day, my lad," said the older man, smiling, laying his hand kindly upon the boy's shoulder. "Keep a bright lookout, always, Mr. Blakely. It's a good rule on the sea, a good rule everywhere. There goes four bells. Tell the bo's'n's mate to turn the men to. Let them break out the holystones and scrub decks."

"Ay, ay, sir," said Blakely. "Bo's'n's mate!" he called, shrilly. "Turn the hands to and get the decks washed down at once!"

The decks were already as white and clean as laboring humanity could make them, but the invariable routine of the ship had to be carried out. Captain Little was a strict disciplinarian, and his requirements were comparable only to those of the Medes and Persians. He had been known to have the decks of the *Boston* washed, holystoned, and squilgeed in the midst of a rain storm!

"Tops'l yard there!" said the lieutenant going forward between the knight-heads and looking up at Lang. "D'ye see anything there?"

"No, sir," answered the man; "leastways I ain't sure. Mebbe— Sail ho!" he shouted, suddenly.

"Where away?" cried the officer, his languid manner instantly disappearing, as he straightened up and listened for the reply.

IN THE WASP'S NEST

"Right ahead, sir!"

"Can you make her out?"

"Not yet, sir. 'Taint light enough."

"Go up on the to'-gallant yard and try if you can see anything more. Mr. Blakely, step aft to the cabin at once. Give my compliments to the captain and tell him we've raised a sail right ahead."

"Sail ho!" again came floating down from the topsail yard.

"Keep fast, Mr. Blakely. Aloft there! What do you mean?"

"I see another sail, sir. There's two on 'em, sir. Close together. Hull down."

"Say to Captain Little that two sail have been sighted. Evidently sailing in company, Mr. Blakely," said the officer, "and as you pass tell the quartermaster of the watch to fetch me my glass."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered Blakely, saluting again, and scampering as fast as his small legs could carry him. It was astonishing how many times a midshipman had to salute in the course of a single watch.

"Ah, quartermaster!" said the watch officer a moment later as that functionary reported to him, telescope in hand. "Take that glass up to Lang on the foreto'-gallant yard and see what you and he can make out of the sails reported."

Meanwhile the deck-scrubbing operations had stopped. The men crowded forward in excited

THE BOSTON CHASES A STRANGER

groups, dropping the holystone ropes, holding the squilgees poised in the air, while the bucket brigade stood idle with the buckets balanced against the rail, all deeply interested in the sails which had been reported. Visions of prize money danced in their minds, for it was hardly likely that the ships were American, and not likely either that they would be men-of-war of which the French had but few in those waters. In a moment, however, Mr. Talcott, the officer, became aware of the cessation of work and the curiosity of the men.

"Sink me!" he shrieked, fiercely, jumping to the break of the forecastle, "what d'ye mean by jamming forward here like flies on a lump of sugar!" shaking his fist at the startled watch. "Is this a convention or a political meeting? Turn to there, ye lubbers! Get at those decks! Bear a hand about it, too! Bo's'n's mate, where's your colt? Give 'em a touch of the rope's end. I wouldn't give much for your lives if the captain saw you idling this way."

As if they had been galvanized into action the men sprang to work and the splashing of water from the buckets was followed by the harsh grinding of the holystones pulled to and fro by the ropes over the deck, and the sucking clasp of the rubber tipped squilgees drying after.

"I can make 'em out now, sir," shouted Lang from the top-gallant yard at this juncture.

"Avast that scrubbing!" cried Talcott at once to

IN THE WASP'S NEST

the deck washers. "Keep fast all that deck work! I can't hear myself think. What are they?" he hailed aloft.

"A ship an' a large schooner, sir."

"What sort of a ship?"

"Looks like a man-o'-war, sir, with a marchant schooner er privateer."

The men, undeterred by Talcott's ferocious growling and threatening mien, for they knew that officer's bark was much worse than his bite, broke into eager cheers, waving their hats, hugging each other, executing horn-pipes upon the deck, in the midst of which the tall form of Captain Little suddenly appeared.

"What's this? What's this?" he cried, sharply. "Are you having a ball, Mr. Talcott, or a political caucus? Wreck me, sir, is a United States ship to be turned into a dancing school? To your work, fellows, and don't splash me if you don't want to get a dose of the cat!"* he cried, tiptoeing over the wet deck in his polished, buckled shoes, among the men, who frantically sprang to work again, till he gained the top-gallant fore-castle, followed by the midshipman.

"Mr. Blakely," he added, "see that there is no shirking in the deck-washing this morning. Now, Mr. Talcott, you said two sail had been sighted, sir?"

"Yes, sir."

* The cat-o-nine-tails used for flogging.

THE BOSTON CHASES A STRANGER

"Where away?"

"Right ahead, sir."

"What are they?"

"A ship and large schooner."

"Ha! Nothing more in sight?"

"Not yet, sir."

"Who's on the to'-gallant yard?"

"Lang, sir, and the quartermaster."

"Aloft there!" shouted the captain, in a quick, powerful voice. "Can you make out anything more yet?"

"We think they're French, sir, an' the ship's a heavily armed marchantman er man-o'-war, sure. They've changed their course summat an' are edgin' away!" was the reply.

"How do they bear now?" cried the captain. "Point!"

"Ha! So!" he said, following the outstretched finger with his gaze. "Aft there! Starboard your helm a little! That's well." As the ship's bow swept about a little he called out again. "Aloft there! How does she bear now?"

"Right ahead, sir."

"Very well dyce!" said the captain turning aft toward the helmsman. "Wheel, then, keep her as she is," he sang out, as he made his way aft, followed by the watch officer. "We'll have a nearer look at these fellows. Mr. Talcott, call all hands at once, sir."

CHAPTER II

THE *BOSTON* TAKES *LE BERCEAU*

PRESENTLY down on the berth deck the hoarse cries of the boatswain's mates could be heard summoning the men to their stations. The news of the sighting of the two vessels ran through the ship like wildfire, and the watch below came tumbling up from between decks half dressed in their eagerness. The officers, hastily putting on their clothing, also ran to their stations. The first lieutenant seized the trumpet and looked to the captain, who said :

"I want you to break out the stuns'ls, Mr. Dickinson, and every rag of canvas we've got, and clap it on and follow those ships ahead, sir."

It was broad sun up now, and the light haze of the autumn morning had disappeared as if by magic.

"I can make them out from the deck, now, sir," ventured Lieutenant Talcott. "You can see them quite plainly with the glass, sir," he added, handing the telescope to his captain, while the crew busied themselves with setting those airy wings which, because they projected far beyond the wide yard arms from the light booms on either side were called studding sails, or, in sea language, "stuns'ls." Used

THE *BOSTON* TAKES *LE BERCEAU*

in light breezes like that prevalent on that morning, they materially added to the motive power of the ship, and therefore increased her speed.

The *Boston* was a new vessel, made after the best American models, and was therefore very swift. The two vessels sighted, however, about six miles ahead when they were first observed, were also good goers. In fact the schooner, which was the nearer of the two to the American, soon showed that she had the heels both of her pursuer and her consort, for she slipped away from the one and passed the other almost as if the two square riggers had been anchored, but the other ship enjoyed no such advantage, for the *Boston* began slowly to overhaul her. It was quite evident as the morning wore on and the American approached nearer to the chase, that the vessel ahead of them was a large French corvette, although apparently no match either in size or armament for the *Boston*.

The French ship made every effort to escape. She, too, was covered alow and aloft with stuns'ls, and by changing her direction from time to time her captain made a comparison between the speed of the two ships on these different courses, for Little, of course, followed his every manœuvre; but in every instance the American ship outfooted the French cruiser, and the French were supposed to build the fastest and best modelled ships that floated on the ocean.

At four bells in the morning watch the schooner

IN THE WASP'S NEST

was hull down on the horizon, while the French ship was distant only about four miles. At six bells the *Boston* had gained so perceptibly that the chase began to relieve herself by cutting away her spare anchors and throwing overboard everything heavy and movable ; but, favored by a slight increase in the breeze and by one or two additional slants of wind, the *Boston*, which was beautifully handled by her captain, a prime sailor, steadily continued to overhaul the fleeing French ship. At two o'clock, or four bells in the afternoon watch, scarcely a mile intervened between the two.

The chase now began to throw overboard ballast and spare spars, and at last to cast adrift her boats—everything, in fact, that would lighten the ship and increase her chance of escape. On every yard the men were stationed wetting down the sails to make them hold the wind. In their despair they even started the water-casks and began to discharge their precious supply. Neither vessel had as yet shown any flag, although there was no possibility of disguising the character or nationality of either of them. The experienced officers on both ships knew that they were in the presence of an enemy.

At seven bells in the afternoon watch Captain Little, who was forward, the better to observe the chase, directed the colors to be shown and that the bow chasers should open fire.

“Mr. Talcott,” he said to the lieutenant who commanded the forward division, “try your barkers

THE BOSTON TAKES LE BERCEAU

on her. It's a long shot, but perhaps you can wing her."

To wing her was all that would be necessary, for should the *Boston* once get the smaller French ship under her guns the result might be considered certain.

"Ay, ay, sir," said Talcott, rejoiced at being permitted to begin. "Lang!" he shouted, to the quarter gunner of his division, "you're the best shot in the division, have a try at Monsieur yonder."

"Werry good, sir," said Lang, blowing the smoking loggerhead or match in his hand and taking a long squint over the starboard gun, which, by means of the side tackles and chocks and quoins, he trained and elevated carefully till it bore on the French ship to his satisfaction. Waiting with watchful care, glancing along the barrel of the gun until the pitch of the ship brought it exactly into the right position, he quickly stepped aside and applied the lighted match to the priming. The ball went hurtling over the water just astern of the chase. An instant after the port bow chaser roared out with no better results.

"Good line shots, men," said the captain, appreciatively watching the course of the balls, "but we're not quite in range yet. Keep fast the battery. Ha, what's that?"

"That" was a puff of smoke that broke out aft from the Frenchman, followed in a few seconds by the dull roar of a cannon.

IN THE WASP'S NEST

"He's trying his metal on us," said the captain, as the ball splashed into the water about two cable lengths ahead of the flying *Boston*. He turned and addressed the first lieutenant. "Mr. Dickinson, we shall approach to port* of her. We'll be alongside in a few moments. Man the starboard battery! Cast loose and provide! Keep fast your fire until I give the word. "Mr. Allen," he said to the sailing-master, whose duty it was to attend to the sailing of the ship during the engagement, as he turned and walked aft, "as soon as we get alongside and the action begins, I want your sail trimmers to take in those stuns'ls. They will just embarrass us, and we'll not need them set. Once we get her under our broadside we won't let her get away."

"Very good, sir," said the master. "I'll attend to it."

"There go her colors," cried the captain. "French, of course. Ha!" his eyes sparkling, "we've got her now, men!" an announcement which was greeted with mighty cheers from the men in the batteries below the poop on the main deck. "Now, men, mind, no firing until I give the word!"

For some fifteen minutes the two ships swept steadily on. Seeing the hopelessness of escape the

* For the better understanding of my young readers and for euphony, I have substituted the modern word "port" for the ancient expression "larboard."

THE BOSTON TAKES LE BERCEAU

French captain at last gallantly took in his own stuns'ls, an example which Little gladly followed instead of waiting for the confusion attending upon the beginning of the action. Both ships presented scenes of wild disorder, more apparent than real, for a few moments, but as the stuns'ls came in and were stowed away the confusion subsided on the American sloop-of-war, and in perfect silence she bore down on the doomed French ship.

The French captain suddenly put his helm down and bore up, making an attempt to get a position to rake, but Little, who had gone aft to the poop, promptly frustrated his attempt by duplicating his manœuvre. The two ships came up to the wind on the port tack therefore, the *Boston* to windward, and at a quarter after three they were close aboard.

"Ship ahoy!" cried the American captain, springing into the mizzen rigging. "What ship is that?"

"*Le Corvette Le Berceau, le Citoyen Capitaine André Senez,*" was the reply.

"Good," said Little, turning to the crowd of officers behind him. "I know him by reputation. He fought under D'Estaing in the Revolution. He is one of the bravest officers in the French navy, and yon ship's done our commerce a deal of damage. We'll get a good fight out of him."

The two ships formed a sort of bow-and-quarter-line at the time, and none of the guns in their broadsides bore effectively at that moment. Both

IN THE WASP'S NEST

captains determined to wait until the ships were fairly abreast of each other before delivering their fire. Consequently there was time for further conversation.

"What port are you from?" asked Little through the trumpet.

"Cayenne."

"Whither bound?"

"Cruising. Vat sheep iz zat?"

"The United States Ship *Boston*, Captain George Little. Strike your flag, sir!"

"Nevair!" cried the Frenchman, shaking his hand at his enemy.

The two ships were fairly abeam.

"*Tirez! Tirez!*" cried the Frenchman, suddenly.

"Let her have it, men!" roared Little, at the same instant, shaking his trumpet toward the star-board battery.

The broadsides of the two ships roared out simultaneously. As she fired, the *Boston*, being to windward, sheered toward the Frenchman, and the action began at half pistol shot distance, about seventy-five feet, or the width of an ordinary street.

For two hours the ships sailed side by side, attempts on the part of either one to close and board being frustrated by the vigilance of the other, as they poured their broadsides upon each other at pointblank range. The crew on both sides had enjoyed but little gunnery practice; the guns were small (they were, of course, all old-fashioned muzzle-

THE *BOSTON* TAKES *LE BERCEAU*

loaders, without sights or gun-locks) ; they had to be primed with loose powder and discharged by a slow match or a loggerhead—*i. e.*, a hot iron; consequently the battle was a slow one.

By Little's orders the heavier American ship paid particular attention to the hull of her enemy, and kept pounding away at the French ship with ceaseless persistence, while the French captain, desirous of crippling his pursuer, turned most of his attention to the American spars.

At six o'clock in the evening, the topsail tyes of the *Boston* having been shot away in succession, the yards came thundering down on the caps, and the ship, deprived of the vast spread of the topsails, the most important sails, lost way ; and as the sails of *Le Berceau* still held the wind, although she was very badly cut up, she began slowly to run away from the American. At five minutes after six there was a lull in the action, and the Frenchman, now some distance ahead and drawing slowly out of range, congratulated themselves that they had at last beaten off their larger antagonist.

But a very indomitable seaman was Captain George Little, of the *Boston*. Under his incitement his crew worked with superhuman energy, reeving new topsail halliards, splicing the shattered shrouds, making the preventers take the place of the torn backstays and braces, until after an hour's desperate work they were in condition to renew the conflict.

IN THE WASP'S NEST

Meanwhile similar endeavors had been put forth by the French ship, but her own spars had been too badly wounded to enable her to carry a press of sail, and the *Boston* slowly began to creep up on her quarter again. At eight o'clock at night the two ships were once more within easy range of one another. It was quite dark now, but the ships were so close that the flashes of the guns enabled the gunners to take easy aim, and the conflict continued fiercely until eleven o'clock at night. Again the tactics of the Frenchman succeeded in so wrecking the American aloft that the *Boston* drifted out of action a second time.

Once more the French ship drew ahead, but she had barely got out of gunshot range when her three topmasts, deprived of the support of all the shrouds and backstays, carried away, as did the jib-boom. The heavy hulling she had received from the *Boston* had cut to pieces her spare topmasts on the gallows' frames, and she was without means of repairing the loss. Her lower masts, carrying fore and main sails, however, gave her enough way in the water to keep her just ahead of the *Boston*, which remained out of gunshot during the night in spite of every effort that Little and his men could make, although they did succeed in keeping the chase in sight.

When day broke the *Boston* was some distance to leeward of the French ship, and the crews of both vessels were working furiously to get them in trim, the one hoping for further fight, the other looking

THE *BOSTON* TAKES *LE BERCEAU*

for a chance to escape. At half after eleven in the morning, however, the breeze having freshened somewhat, the foremast of the French ship, which had been terribly cut up, broke short off above the deck and fell to starboard, dragging down in its fall the main and mizzen masts. *Le Berceau* was a helpless wreck. Seeing this the *Boston* more deliberately completed her repairs and at two o'clock in the afternoon came ranging up to starboard in apparently as good condition as ever. The men were at quarters, the guns loaded and primed, and the French ship was completely at Little's mercy.

Having defended himself heroically against a ship more than half as large again as his own, having fought parts of two days and being absolutely without means of further resistance, for the *Boston* could now take any position she desired with reference to *Le Berceau*, Captain Senez reluctantly struck his flag.

This most remarkable battle, unequalled for the persistency of both the defence, the pursuit, and the attack, was over.

CHAPTER III

THE BABY ON *LE BERCEAU*

"MR. TALCOTT," said Captain Little as the French captain answered in the affirmative to his hail to know whether they had surrendered or not, "take Mr. Blakely and the first cutter if she is seaworthy, and go aboard the enemy and take possession."

"Mr. Chips," said Talcott, addressing the carpenter, "overhaul the first cutter and let me know if she's all right."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the carpenter, clambering up into the boat swinging at the davits, which after a swift examination he pronounced in good order and unharmed by the enemy's shot.

"Call the first cutter's crew, boatswain's mate," said Talcott after he received the carpenter's report.

"Away, all the first cutters, away!" bellowed the boatswain's mate, and in a few minutes the men, heavily armed with cutlass and pistol, came running aft, cast off the boat gripes, sprang to their places at the thwarts, while others swung the cutter out board, lowered away the falls, and dropped the boat from the davits into the smooth water alongside.

"Mr. Blakely," said Talcott, stepping to the gangway, where the cutter was dropped backward to re-

THE BABY ON *LE BERCEAU*

ceive him, "Why the empty thwart, sir, and where is your Cox'un? Two of your men are missing. Where are they, sir?"

"One is wounded and one killed, sir," replied the midshipman attached to the boat.

"Too bad!" said Talcott. "Captain Little, may I have two other men?"

"Certainly. Volunteers here for the first cutter!"

From the group which pressed forward Talcott selected two men, one of whom was our friend old Jack Lang, who was detailed to act as coxswain, or steersman.

"Mr. Talcott," said the captain, "I want you to do everything up shipshape. Remember that the enemy are watching you."

"Very good, sir," said the lieutenant, clambering down the side battens. Taking his place in the stern sheets he called sharply, "Up oars!" Ten of the men in the heavy cutter simultaneously tossed their heavy ash oars into the air, holding them directly in front of them, the blades fore and aft. The two men in the bows stood facing forward handling their boat hooks. At the command, "Shove off!" the bow oarsmen cast off the painter, dropped their boat hooks against the side of the *Boston*, and by a vigorous shove drove the boat clear of the ship.

"Let fall!" cried Talcott.

The oars were eased down gently, and as they struck the water:

"Give way!" he added.

IN THE WASP'S NEST

With the precision and quick work of well-trained oarsmen they caught the time as given by the stroke oar, and in a long, sweeping, vigorous man-o'-war stroke they pulled their way toward the shattered French ship.

Certainly no vessel ever presented a more melancholy picture than that which they were approaching. Looking at her with the critical eye of a sailor, Talcott almost felt a sensation of pity as he noted the utter ruin caused to the once beautiful ship, by the superior American gunnery. To begin with, not a single mast or spar was left standing. The jagged stump of the main mast alone protruded a few feet above the rail. The whole port side was cumbered with a mass of wreckage. Heavy spars, torn canvas, tangled cordage and rigging beat and hammered against the sides with every roll of the ship. The dispirited Frenchmen had apparently made no effort whatever to clear away the wreck after the surrender. Gaping holes along the engaged side permitted a clear view of the wrecked interior. The battery was ruined. Every other gun was dismounted, carriages had been smashed, and most of the guns were put out of action. The port-holes had been knocked into each other—in short, the whole ship looked like a hopeless ruin, and her fine lines and beautiful model only served to accentuate the brutal pounding she had received.

"She looks bad, doesn't she?" remarked Talcott to the midshipman. There was a note of sadness in

THE BABY ON *LE BERCEAU*

his professional pride to see that beautiful and graceful creation of the ship builder's art so mishandled.

"Yes, sir," carelessly replied the youngster; "we knocked her into a cocked hat."

"No wonder she struck," said Talcott. "Look at the *Boston*," he added, turning his glance back to his own ship.

To an unskilled person she appeared much as she had before the action, but the patches on the sails, the huge knots and rough-and-ready splices in the rigging, and the number of gaping wounds in the sides, hastily patched, the shot holes temporarily plugged, indicated that she had by no means come off scatheless. Still the disproportion in execution on the two combatants was not warranted by the superior size of the American ship. Her gunnery in the long, hard-fought action had been simply terrific.

"Think we can save her, Mr. Talcott?" ventured the midshipman.

"That depends upon how many shot went below the water-line. However, we'll soon know. I think we would better go around to starboard, Lang," he said, turning to the sailor who was steering. "We can't board her in the midst of all that raffle. Pass under her stern there. Port your helm!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Back water starboard!"

The heavy cutter, under the combined influence of oars and helm, swept around the stern of the prize

IN THE WASP'S NEST

and approached the starboard side. Lang, with skilful handling, brought her gently to the gangway. The oars were laid inboard, and Talcott, followed by Blakely, Lang, and the rest of the boat crew, with the exception of the two boat-keepers, scrambled on deck.

There the ruin was more apparent even than it had been before. Everything movable had been shot away. There was not a boat that had not been shattered. The *Boston* had made a chopping-block out of the unfortunate Frenchman. As Talcott appeared in the gangway an officer, pale and bloodstained from a wound in the face, came up to him and, bowing profoundly, tendered his sword.

"Citizen lieutenant," he said, in French, "the fortune of war has made my little vessel the prize of your great ship."

As it happened Talcott was an excellent French scholar, and he replied courteously in the language used by the officer, as he took his sword,

"I shall always be ready to testify, monsieur, that it was through no fault of your own, for I never saw a more gallant defence. Now, sir, will you tell us again the name of this ship?"

"*Le Berceau*, citizen," answered the Frenchman, "and I am Captain André Senez. 'Tis not my first acquaintance with your beautiful flag, citizen lieutenant," he added, "for I was a midshipman under Admiral D'Estaing when we helped you gain your independence."



The surrender of *Le Berceau*.



THE BABY ON *LE BERCEAU*

There was a world of reproach in the meaning glance, which accompanied these apparently simple words. Talcott flushed hotly as he replied :

“To tell you the truth, monsieur, I hardly know what we are at war about.”

“Quite so,” answered the French captain, “and I am equally in the dark. It seems strange that the two great republics of the earth should be at swords’ points.”

“Yes,” assented Talcott, “doesn’t it? However, monsieur, all this is no present concern of ours, and I have my duty to perform. Captain Little of my ship, the *Boston*, requests you to go aboard at once.”

“At your pleasure, my lieutenant,” answered Senez, sadly. “I must of course, do what you say.”

“What are your casualties?”

“The republic has lost four brave citizen sailors killed and seventeen equally brave citizen sailors wounded.”

“Do you need anything for them?”

“No, citizen, our citizen surgeon has made them as comfortable as possible.”

“Very good,” answered Talcott. “Have you a boat left that will swim?”

“Alas, no, citizen,” answered the Frenchman.

Talcott hesitated a moment, and then stepped over to the rail, hollowed his hand and hailed the *Boston*.

IN THE WASP'S NEST

"Ahoy the *Boston*!"

"Ahoy the prize!" answered Captain Little himself, springing up on the mizzen sheer poles the better to see.

"They have four men killed and seventeen wounded," answered Talcott. "The ship's a perfect wreck. She hasn't a boat left that will float. There are two hundred men on board of her."

"Will she float herself?" asked the captain.

After a rapid exchange of questions and answers with Senez, Talcott replied:

"I think so. She is making water slightly, but I think we can patch her up. I would suggest sending over boats to take off the prisoners."

"Very good; it shall be attended to," said the captain, turning inboard and giving a word or two of command, which were followed by hasty movements on the *Boston*, and the launch of such of their boats as were seaworthy for the purpose of transshipping the French prisoners.

Meanwhile Talcott set himself to put the prize to rights and directed Lang to take charge of his own boat crew and to cut away the wreck with the French boarding axes which were to be had in the arm chests. It was a tremendous job for a dozen men to undertake, and the American seamen, who could speak a sort of patois lingua Franca of the Mediterranean, endeavored to get the French seamen to assist them.

"Here, ye frog-eatin' lubbers!" cried Lang in

THE BABY ON *LE BERCEAU*

desperation at last. "Bear a hand here an' give us a lift at clearin' away this raffle!"

His tone was imperious and his manner more so.

"Hold on!" cried Captain Senez, who saw his action, and, having learned English in his youth, easily made out his meaning. "'Tis not in accordance with the principles of equality of the French Republic to address the brave citizen seamen of that Republic so imperatively, citizen American."

"'Citizen American!' Well, I'll be jiggered!" growled Lang in surprise at this fantastic remark.

"Precisely. On this ship all are equals," interrupted the French captain, who understood perfectly, it seemed.

"Ekals on a man-o'-war?" shouted the American sailor, incredulously.

"Yes, citizens everywhere," returned the Frenchman, equably.

"That's why you git licked so often and so easy," growled Lang, in despair at such a subversive theory of government for a man-of-war, as he sprang at the mass of wreckage, boarding-axe in hand. "Ekality's werry well ashore. This yere republican business is good enough fer land lubbers, but if ye want a smart ship ye'll have to git rid of that ekality notion. I don't like it, fer one. Wot! me an' the cap'n ekals!" he continued, whacking away at a jagged spar.

There was much rude philosophy in his remarks, and after the French navy had been thoroughly

IN THE WASP'S NEST

beaten a vast number of times by the ships of all nations who engaged her they learned what Lang said was true.

Captain Senez now invited Talcott and Blakely to go below to his cabin while he got his baggage together, and to partake of such hospitality as he could offer. As the lieutenant put foot on the companion-way he was startled by a sound rarely heard on board a man-of-war. It was the shrill cry of a very young child—a baby, in fact!

CHAPTER IV

JACK LANG IS APPOINTED HEAD NURSE

"WELL, I'll be jiggered!" exclaimed Mr. Talcott, turning to the captain as the significance of the cry dawned upon him. "That's a baby, surely! Do French ships carry babies as part of their complement, sir? Is that another new republican idea?"

"Alas, no, citizen captain," answered the Frenchman, smiling faintly. "This is, I fear, a compatriot of your own."

"I don't understand."

"'Tis very simple," said the Frenchman, shrugging his shoulders, "three days ago we picked up a boat on which we found a woman and this poor infant. They were both nearly dead, but revived somewhat under the careful treatment of the citizen surgeon, but the mind of the poor citizeness did not come back with returning health. We know not who she is, and we grieve to tell you that a shot from your ship late last night put her out of her misery."

"I see," said Talcott. "And the baby?"

"I think he is hungry, citizen."

"Why haven't you fed him?"

IN THE WASP'S NEST

"My lieutenant, we have nothing, no milk, nothing. I am not experienced in babies. We have been so busy trying to get away there has not been time——"

"There he goes again," interrupted Talcott as the baby piped up shrilly once more. "Poor little rascal! What on earth shall we do with him? Mr. Blakely, I suppose you have not had much experience with babies?"

"No, sir," answered the midshipman, solemnly. "I never had any of my own."

"There, there, Mr. Blakely, that will do. I only thought it being such a short period since you were a—er—I wonder if any of the men have had experience with them?"

"Jack Lang is married, sir," answered the midshipman rather huffily, on account of his officer's slighting remarks; "perhaps he knows."

"Fetch him here," said Talcott.

"Lang!" called out Blakely, "you're wanted aft to take care of a baby."

"Wot!" cried Lang, greatly astonished, in fact almost falling overboard in his confusion. "Me, sir! To take keer of a babby!"

"This habit of talking back will be the death of you, Lang," called out Talcott, shortly. "Lay aft here at once, sirrah! There's a baby on board. Didn't you hear him pipe up? Can't you hear him now? Are you deaf, man? Did you never hear a baby cry before? D'ye think it is the boatswain's

JACK LANG APPOINTED HEAD NURSE

whistle? I understand that you have had babies of your own."

"Ay, sir, I have. Three on 'em."

"Well, then, I'll detail you temporarily to nurse this blasted infant. That will do! Come below here. We'll have a look at it."

"Well, may I be horn swoggled!" muttered Lang under his breath, as he reluctantly followed the officer down the ladder amid the laughter and derisive cheers of the Americans on board the ship. "I didn't sign no ship's articles to nuss no babbies wotsumever. If the truth was knowed I think 'twas to git away from 'em that I shipped fer the cruise."

For all his resentment, however, the sailor took good care that no one heard him except the midshipman. Discipline on ships of war in that day was of the very sternest character, and enforced in the most brutal way, and rank was spelled with a big "r" and officer with a very round "o" indeed. There was not a whit of equality on an American or English ship. Most of the American officers had been recruited from the merchant service, and they were prompt to enforce discipline by the aid of a marline-spike or a clenched fist without a moment's hesitation.

Talcott would have thought nothing of kicking Lang down the hatchway, or knocking him over with his fist, or anything else that came handy, and it would have been certain and sudden death for the

IN THE WASP'S NEST

sailor to resist. Yet Talcott was an exceptionally kind and considerate officer for his day, and one well liked by his men. Things on American warships are greatly different now; the men are well treated, and that they are human beings entitled to every consideration is recognized by all. Bad as things were in that day they were much better than on the ships of other nations, and American crews, comparatively speaking, were well treated. Even on *Le Berceau*, with all the equality notions in the air, things were bad for the men.

The little party were soon in the cabin. Lying on a transom was the body of a woman. As he stepped over to her Talcott took off his hat, an example which Blakely and Lang instantly followed. The woman's face had been beautiful. Great masses of dark hair were tangled about her pale brow. She was emaciated to a terrible degree. She had evidently suffered severely from starvation and exposure before she had been rescued, and the few days of comparative comfort which she had passed on the French vessel had not sufficed to restore her vigor. Her figure was very inadequately dressed in make-shift garments improvised from officers' uniforms and bed linen.

"She had almost nothing on, citizen," said the French captain, noting the officer's curious glance at her apparel. "When we picked her up she wore nothing save a night-robe, or wrapper."

"Poor woman," said Talcott, as he looked again.

JACK LANG APPOINTED HEAD NURSE

"Poor lady," he added. "Haven't you a sheet or something to cover her face with?"

"Certainly, certainly," said Senez, stepping into his own berth and bringing one out.

"It seems more decent, you know," said Talcott, pityingly, "to cover her up." He drew the linen over her very carefully. "There was nothing to tell who she was?"

"Nothing at all."

"No name on her clothes?"

"Nothing but the letter 'D' embroidered upon them."

"And the baby?"

"There it is."

As the lieutenant turned his gaze aft he saw the infant, which had stopped crying, blinking up at him from a pile of blankets in a corner on the cabin floor. As he stooped over it, the baby, which had been persistently sucking his little fist as if in the effort he could extract something nourishing, broke into another series of piteous cries.

"Good Lord!" muttered the lieutenant, "what shall we do with it? Lang, I've detailed you to nurse this infant. What do you suggest?"

Lang scratched his head dubiously.

"Well, ye see, sir, I've got three children, but I allus watched 'em with the ole woman handy, an' w'en anythin' occurred, w'en they got bilged, er brung up on a lee shore as it was, er w'en they needed waterin' er prowisionin', she was allus there to take

IN THE WASP'S NEST

command. The fact is, sir, I warn't much more'n a kind of bo's'n's mate."

"Excuse me, sir," said Blakely, "I think it wants something to eat."

"Right O! Mr. Blakely. Nine times out o' ten w'en a babby cries he wants somethin' to eat, an' nine times out o' ten w'en a man's in trouble an' goes bellerin' round, it's the same thing," responded Lang, with voluble assurance.

"Well, what do babies usually eat?" asked Talcott.

"Milk, sir," volunteered Blakely.

"Oh, that is it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, where'll we get any milk out here a thousand miles from land? You haven't a cow on board, Captain Senez?"

"Alas, no, citizen."

"How would a piece of fat pork do for him to chew on?" suggested the lieutenant, desperately.

"'Twouldn' do at all, I thinks, beggin' yer pardon, sir," answered Lang. "Wot this yere babby wants is soft tack."

"Give him some lobscouse, then," said Talcott.

"Mr. Blakely, step forward and see if you can't get hold of the ship's cook and get him to——"

"Citizen lieutenant," interrupted the French captain, as a little fat doctor came bustling into the cabin, "permit me to introduce to you the citizen surgeon. Possibly he can assist you."

JACK LANG APPOINTED HEAD NURSE

"We're in a dilemma, doctor," said Talcott, bluntly; "perhaps you can help us out. What's the matter with this infant?"

"I should imagine, citizen lieutenant," said the surgeon, "that he is hungry."

"Well, what shall we feed him?"

"My practice, my lieutenant, has been among men hitherto. I am sorry to say that I know but little about infants, but I should suggest something soft."

"Just what my man here says," said Talcott. "He says lobsouse."

"What is that? Lobsouse? I do not know the word."

"Why, hardtack, you know, softened with water and a bit of salt added, and if you have a little dab of grease" (a pat of butter) "so much the better."

"We have the butter, citizen; at least we did have before we met you, but one of your shot played havoc with our cabin store-room, and I have no doubt that the—pardon, what you call it—souse?—will be the best thing for the poor infant."

"Well," said Talcott, greatly relieved. "Mr. Blakely, you will have the—er—food prepared at once. Lang, I will leave the baby with you. No, thank you, Captain Senez, no wine now. I have spent so much time over this baby business that I have to go on deck, and I shall ask you to come with me. You must go aboard the *Boston* in the first boat."

IN THE WASP'S NEST

When Talcott regained the deck the first of the boats of the *Boston* was already alongside. Giving the necessary directions looking to the transshipment of the French crew, the lieutenant stepped to the side of the ship and once more hailed the *Boston*. When Captain Little appeared on the rail in answer to his call he imparted the astonishing information that they had not only captured a ship, but a baby as well.

"Captain Little!" he cried.

"Well, what now?"

"I have to report, sir, that this ship is well named *Le Berceau*."

"How is that, sir?"

The two ships were close enough now to allow the conversation to be carried on in an ordinary tone of voice.

"Why, sir," answered Talcott, "the meaning of the word *Berceau* is cradle, and the fact is they have a baby on board."

"A baby, sir? What d'ye mean?"

"I mean just an ordinary baby, sir."

"Is it alive?"

"It is, very much so."

"Whose baby is it?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Where is its mother, or father?"

"I don't know anything about its father. Its mother is aboard her, dead."

"Good heavens, is it possible?" cried Little, in a

JACK LANG APPOINTED HEAD NURSE

shocked voice, taking off his hat as he spoke, out of respect to the dead.

"She was picked up three days ago in an open boat with the baby, and one of our shot killed her last night."

"Is it an American baby?"

"Yes, sir; at least it cries like one."

"What have you done with it?"

"Haven't done anything with it yet, sir. It's down below now, and we are feeding it lobsouse."

"Who's taking care of it?"

"Jack Lang, sir."

"He'll make a healthy nurse!" roared the captain, and, in spite of discipline and everything else, the ship rang with laughter.

Jack Lang had heard the whole conversation from where he sat near an open port-hole in the cabin, holding the baby awkwardly on his knee, feeding it bits of the 'scouse, artistically prepared by the French cook, an article of diet which the hungry infant was greedily absorbing by the way. The old man's bronzed face flushed a darker hue as he heard the gibing laughter. He stopped his awkward attempts at feeding his poor little charge and shook his fist in the air in a way that boded ill for the jeerers when they came within reach of his arm.

"I'll be danged if I'll do it! I didn't sign no articles of war that a sailorman would be a female nuss, an' I ain't goin' to be a nuss, nuther."

Then as he looked down at the drawn, pinched

IN THE WASP'S NEST

face of the little bit of helpless humanity which was greedily sucking away at the 'scouse, his heart softened. In that mood it needed but a glance at the still form of the woman under the sheet to change his mind.

"I don't keer wot they says," he muttered to himself, "me an' this youngster is shipmates an' messmates now fer the rest of our cruise. I'll take keer on you, babby," he whispered, laying his huge hand tenderly on the downy little head.

The baby smiled at him confidently as he looked down upon it, and that was reward enough for old Jack Lang. Henceforth the infant had a devoted follower for life in the veteran sailor.

CHAPTER V

LANG AND THE BABY BERTH WITH THE CAPTAIN

It was late in the first dog watch before the transshipment of the prisoners from the prize to the *Boston* was completed. The last boat that came off from *Le Berceau* brought the dead body of the poor mother and the little baby, who was tenderly if awkwardly held in the arms of its old sailorman nurse, Jack Lang. Captain Little had concluded that the infant could be better cared for on the *Boston* than on the dismantled French ship.

The prize crew had been working assiduously meanwhile. They had cleared away the wreck, rigged up a jury mast forward out of the *Boston's* spare spars, patched up the shot holes roughly, and got the ship in such a condition that she was seaworthy, after they had finished with her, and could make St. Kitts without difficulty, unless it came on to blow, of which there was no present indication.

Talcott and Blakely were in the boat with Lang and the baby. The third lieutenant and another midshipman had been detailed to take charge of the prize with another crew. The sight of old Jack Lang awkwardly huddled up aft, gingerly yet proudly

IN THE WASP'S NEST

holding the baby on his knee, would have provoked the laughter of his fellows had it not been for the sight of the dead body of the poor woman lying in the stern sheets. When the boat came alongside the body was first hoisted on board by means of a top-burton, then followed by Talcott and Blakely, and next by Lang, tightly clasping the baby to his breast with one arm and clambering up the battens with some difficulty on account of his burden. After that the crew scrambled aboard, with the exception of a man, to attach the tackle blocks. The boat was then dropped aft, the falls hooked on, and she was run smartly up to the davits.

Captain Little met the party at the gangway. On the lee side of the quarter-deck the bodies of the dead seamen, French and American, four of each, were ranged in a line. They had been sewed up in new clean hammocks, each one weighted with round shot, and were ready for burial. The men of the cutter, of course, immediately went forward as soon as they got aboard. The lieutenant, the midshipman, and the sailor with the baby stood awkwardly at the gangway, the dead body of the woman lying at their feet.

"Bo's'n's mate," said the captain, taking off his hat, "I wish you would take the body of this——" —he bent over and lifted the covering from the woman's face, examined her carefully for a moment—"this lady," he added, "aft to my cabin. Then tell the sailmaker to break out a new ham-

THE BABY WITH THE CAPTAIN

mock and stand by to sew her up like the rest. This is the baby, I suppose, Mr. Talcott?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ahem!" said the captain, dubiously. "Let's have a look at it, Lang."

The sailor held it up gingerly while Captain Little inspected it with a great deal of awe and uncertainty in his gaze.

"What the dickens is to be done with it, I wonder?" he muttered, anxiously. "It seems like a fine child, eh, Mr. Talcott?"

"Yes, sir, very fine. I have not had much experience with children, but Mr. Blakely says——"

"Umph! Ahem!" said the captain, looking severely down at the midshipman, who turned very red at being brought forward so prominently in connection with a baby. "So you think it is a fine child, do you, Mr. Blakely? Ha! A fellow-feeling, I suppose, sir," continued the captain, with a grin at his own humor, at the like of which no midshipman afloat could have dared to take offence in his captain. "And it's a boy, you say, Talcott?"

"Yes, sir. So Captain Senez said."

Captain Little extended his forefinger and prodded the infant gently in the ribs. Its little stomach having been filled with the 'scouse, it had been lying half asleep in Lang's arms, but the touch, which was perhaps harder than the captain had imagined, awakened the child, which immediately burst into a terrible howl. The captain dropped his hand in-

IN THE WASP'S NEST

stantly and staggered back against the rail utterly aghast.

"Wha—wha—what's the matter with it?" he gasped out at last.

"Beggin' yer honor's pardon, sir," ventured Lang, with all the pride of a nurse in her protégé, "I don't think he likes strangers, sir; he——"

"You ass!" said the captain, wrathfully, "aren't you as much of a stranger to him as I am?"

"Yes, sir, in course, sir, but I've fed him, sir, an' I reckon he knows me."

"It's a tribute the—er—infant pays to your authority, Captain Little," audaciously ventured Talcott.

"Yes, yes, of course, I suppose so. Can't you hush the thing up?" he cried, turning to the sailor.

"I'm doin' the best I can, sir," answered the jackie, tossing the baby up and down with much effort, turning very red in the process, the whole crew looking on with vivid and increasing interest. The sweat fairly poured off the old man's forehead in truth, as he awkwardly tried to soothe the child's cries.

"Good Lord!" he burst out at last, in much embarrassment, "I wish my ol' woman was here. She'd know wot to do with this kid."

"Well, she isn't here," said the captain, "and I'd like to know what you're going to do with it."

"If you please, sir," said the small midshipman, timorously, "perhaps he is hungry again."

THE BABY WITH THE CAPTAIN

"Quite likely, Mr. Blakely. A good idea, sir. There's more in you than one would suspect. Go forward and tell the cook to fix up something to choke his luff with as soon as possible. 'Scouse, duff, anything, for heaven's sake! Meanwhile you would better take it below, Lang."

"Yes, sir," answered the miserable but determined sailor, while the baby continued screaming louder than ever, "Where'll I take it?"

"Take it anywhere so you can belay its jaw tackle! It'll ruin the discipline of the ship!" roared the captain almost as red-faced and embarrassed as Lang, as he noticed the amused expression on the faces of officers and men.

"Shall I take it for'ard, sir?"

"No, of course not. How's the ward room, Mr. Talcott?"

"No room there, sir, I should say. There will be so many of us there, you know, with the French officers, and the junior lieutenants are already swinging hammocks. We've no room for it there."

"Well, take it to the steerage then, eh, Mr. Blakely?"

Blakely looked much disgusted at the prospect, but had not rank enough to remonstrate, so he meekly answered,

"Yes, sir."

"If I mought be so bold, yer honor," timorously ventured Lang, looking hesitatingly at his captain.

"Speak out, man, speak out! By gad!" roared

IN THE WASP'S NEST

Little, glad to vent his embarrassment on the sailor, "there's not a more talkative man on the ship! I did well to make you a nurse. You can reel off more unstoppered language in a single tack than a dozen women! What d'ye suggest?"

"Your cabin, sir."

"Great heaven!—Am I to spend the rest of this cruise with that infant howling in my ear?"

"I'll keep him quiet, sir."

"Yes, you're keeping him quiet now, aren't you?"

For a wonder the baby at that moment, to the relief of everyone stopped crying as suddenly as it had begun.

"He's all right now, sir," observed Lang, triumphantly.

"But for how long?" muttered the captain, in deeper disgust. "What do you think of it, Dickinson?" he asked, looking at the first lieutenant.

"I think that's the best place for him, sir. You know you have a spare cabin. The midshipmen are a lot of harum-scarum young fools and heaven knows what would happen to him there. There are enough babies in the steerage anyway," he added, looking severely at little Blakely. "You couldn't send a baby like that for'ard among the men, sir. There's no room in the ward-room and I——"

"Oh, dash it all!" said the captain, giving up, "take him below, and if I hear a word out of you, Lang, or out of the infant either, by heavens, I'll chuck you both overboard! Poor little thing!"

THE BABY WITH THE CAPTAIN

Now, Mr. Talcott, if you will come with me, we'll overhaul the poor lady's effects and see if we can find anything as to who she is and where she comes from. Meanwhile, Mr. Dickinson, swing the yards and get under way. We will stand by the prize until to-morrow morning, or until we see how the weather is. Set the watches and turn the men to. What are you gaping at for'ard there, you blasted idiots?" he shouted fiercely to the men, who were crowded in dense masses in the gangway nearest the captain. "Break out of that gangway and get to your stations! Mr. Dickinson, can't you find anything for these loafers to do? By heavens, sir, I'll send the whole crew to the to'-gallant yard!" he continued, shaking his fist furiously at the men, who fairly fell over themselves to get out of his way.

Then he turned and followed Mr. Talcott and young Blakely, who, though he had not been invited, recklessly thrust himself in with the others because he already felt a responsibility for the little castaway. Such was the captain's perturbation that he actually failed to notice the presumption.

Captain Little and Mr. Talcott reverently examined the body of the poor mother. There was a great gaping wound in her fair young breast where a piece of langridge from the *Boston's* battery had torn its way through the tender flesh, letting the life out.

Such of her original clothing as remained to her,

IN THE WASP'S NEST

for she was dressed in makeshift garments which had been improvised on the French ship, was marked with the letter "D" in elaborate embroidery. It was of exquisite fineness, the materials being of the most dainty and beautiful fabrics. This was apparent even to the eyes of the two sailors, who were not accustomed to handling anything like it.

Owing to the fact that she had been picked up with practically nothing upon her but her night apparel, and from the other circumstances which they learned by questioning Captain Sencz and his officers, Captain Little surmised that she had been awakened by some sudden peril, whatever the catastrophe might have been, possibly a fire, and had been compelled to take refuge in the boat with her baby without having time to dress, and before anyone could join her the boat had gone adrift and had not been noticed in the confusion. She wore no jewels of any sort either, except a wedding-ring. The captain slipped it from the wasted finger and examined it carefully. There was nothing inside but the following:

"Gen. XXXI : 49." He read it off to the little group.

"Genesis, thirty-first chapter and forty-ninth verse. I wonder what that is? Mr. Blakely, step into my berth and fetch me the Bible from the locker."

For all his irascibility the captain was a deeply religious man, and he read his Bible as regularly

THE BABY WITH THE CAPTAIN

every night as he examined the tell-tale compass above his head every morning. When Blakely handed him the Bible he quickly found the place and read to the others this sweet petition of a husband and lover in the wedding-ring, which seemed singularly appropriate to the circumstances in which they had found the woman and the child.

"The Lord watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another."

"Poor, poor lady!" he added, solemnly and tenderly.

CHAPTER VI

COMMITTED TO THE GREAT DEEP

"WELL, gentlemen, there isn't anything to be learned from that," remarked the captain, thoughtfully, after a little pause. "I will retain this ring. Now, let's have a look at the baby."

The infant had been lying peacefully asleep in Lang's arms for some time, and the captain took it up softly with that unfamiliar hesitation with which men usually handle little children. Fortunately it slept soundly all the time. So far as he could, without undressing it, he looked it over very carefully. His eyes finally caught the glint of a gold chain about its neck, and he reached his finger in under the dress and pulled gently on it.

"Ah," he said, "what have we here?"

As he pulled he discovered a handsome jewelled gold locket fastened to the chain. His hands sought for a means of opening it, and finally found a spring. Inside was a miniature, the face of a woman. It was the face of the woman lying on the transom there, but how different! The painter's art had caught the hue of health, and the face that looked out from the little circle of gold was a thing of

COMMITTED TO THE GREAT DEEP

beauty, while that that looked up from the transom was a thing of sadness. On the back of the locket was a monogram in diamonds, composed of the letters "N. E. D."

"'N. E. D.,'" said the captain, "'D.' evidently stands for his last name and the other two for Christian names. The woman is undoubtedly his mother. They resemble each other, too."

He sought for the catch of the chain, found it, opened it, drew it from the baby's neck, and put it in his pocket with the ring.

"See that the finding of this baby and its mother and the description of both these articles are properly entered in the ship's log, Mr. Talcott. Find out, too, from Captain Senez, if he can remember where he picked up the boat with the woman and child in it and make a note of it, and of every other fact you can elicit which may serve to identify the child in full, though I think 'tis most unlikely that we shall ever find anything about it. I take it that there has been a ship on fire and the woman and child were awakened at night, let us say, and put on that boat, which may have been towed astern, while the rest fought the fire, and the boat drifted away, and that's all, until she was picked up by the French ship. Mr. Blakely, tell the sailmaker to come here with his mates and sew up the body of this poor lady, and then fetch me my prayer-book and direct Mr. Dickinson to call all hands to bury the dead. Ask the cook as you go by if he has

IN THE WASP'S NEST

prepared the stuff for the infant. "I suppose it will have to have some clothes, too."

"I think I kin rig up somethin' to fit it, yer honor," said Lang, who could handle the needle as well as most sailors, "if you'll gimme some stuff from the slop chist to work on, sir."

"I don't think we have anything there to make suitable clothes of. I expect you'd better take some of my spare linen sheets, and I have a piece of blue broadcloth I got at Havana. You'll find both in the opposite berth yonder. You can arrange to keep the infant in there, and don't you dare, sirrah, to presume on the fact that you are living aft in the cabin! I want none of your familiarity on the strength of the baby!"

"Wot, me, sir! Lord, no, sir!" answered Lang, speciously. "If yer honor'll gimme permission I'll rig up a small hammock fer the infant to sleep in."

"Very well. Meanwhile, it ought to have a name and I think we'll call it 'Ned' for the present," said the captain. "'N. E. D.,' you know, Mr. Talcott. It's got to have a name of some kind. It doesn't seem just right to call it 'it.'"

"Ned's asleep now, sir," answered the glib Lang. "With yer permission, sir, I'll jest lay him in his berth. He'll be safe enough in this gentle breeze, an' I'll go forward an'——"

"Go, for heaven's sake, and don't talk all day about it! Do what you like for it, but keep silent!

COMMITTED TO THE GREAT DEEP .

Efface yourself so long as you are around where I am. Understand? I don't want to see you, or hear you, or the infant. Keep it quiet and yourself, too!"

Lang opened his mouth to say something, but the fierce glare of the captain warned him that he would better not. He knuckled his forehead, made a sea scrape and darted out of the cabin. A few moments after the shrill whistle of the boatswain's mate resounded through the ship, followed by the hoarse cry,

"All hands bury the dead!"

Captain Little came out of his cabin with his full uniform on, wearing his sword and carrying a huge Book of Common Prayer. All except the necessary lookouts among the crew assembled in the port or lee gangway. Back of the captain the officers of the ship were grouped on the quarter-deck.

"Mr. Dickinson," said the captain, looking about him, "I think we can allow some of the prisoners to come from below to see their comrades buried. Step below to the wardroom, Mr. Blakely, and invite Captain Senez and his officers to come on deck. Mr. Murphy," he added, turning to the lieutenant of marines of which the *Boston* carried a small company, "tell the sergeant-at-arms to let a quarter watch of the shipmates of the dead French seamen come on deck. I do not think we can have them all up, but they will know who should be here."

IN THE WASP'S NEST

While they waited a few moments Captain Senez and his officers came out of the ward-room and steerage where they had been temporarily quartered, and the master-at-arms and the marines escorted some fifty Frenchmen from the hold where the crew of the unfortunate *Berceau* were confined. In obedience to orders these men arranged themselves along the starboard gangway under guard of the marines.

"Are we all ready, Mr. Dickinson?" asked the captain, somewhat nervously.

"All ready, sir."

"Ah, by the way, Captain Senez," he continued, "if you—oh, curse it all, Mr. Talcott, will you please tell Captain Senez that I am going to read prayers for my men myself in default of a chaplain—we have none on the *Boston*—and ask him if he wants to have any special prayers for his own men. Maybe they belong to the—er—er—you understand?"

There was a rapid interchange of conversation between Mr. Talcott and Captain Senez, accompanied by many shrugs of his shoulders and much gesticulation on the part of the latter. Presently Talcott turned to Captain Little in some perplexity.

"He says, sir, so far as I can make out, that since France has become a Republic they have abolished God, or something of that sort, and that they do not seem to believe in prayers."

COMMITTED TO THE GREAT DEEP

"Well, I'll be blowed!" spluttered the captain, in astonishment and indignation. "The idea! Not believe in God and he a sailorman! Tell him, with my compliments, Mr. Talcott, politely but positively, that I believe in God, we all do. Tell him I am going to have prayers for my men and for his as well. You can add that I think it is an infernal shame for a seaman of his reputation to be an atheist. It's no wonder we took him, and I am glad we did," added the sturdy American captain, glancing wrathfully at the indifferent Frenchman.

Mr. Talcott discreetly translated the captain's message according to his own judgment, and as the captain did not understand French he was not sure how much was given to his French compeer. Whatever Mr. Talcott said, however, seemed satisfactory to the Frenchman, who smilingly shrugged his shoulder again as if the whole affair were a matter of little consequence to him.

"Abolish God, indeed! I'd like to see the whole French Republic do it! It's only a half-breed Republic anyway!" muttered the captain, angrily, as he waved his hand to the chief boatswain's mate, opened his book, and removed his cocked hat.

The irascible American gentleman stood very straight and erect as the men lifted the first body, that of an American sailor, and laid it upon a hatch grating. The grating was then lifted up, one end placed on the rail of the ship and the other held by the sailors. The American flag was wrapped around

IN THE WASP'S NEST

the body, the outlines of which were clearly distinguishable through the hammock.

The captain began to read the old familiar words of the Prayer Book, the office for the burial of those at sea. With the first word the officers and crew to a man uncovered. After a moment of hesitation, and as if unwilling to be outdone in politeness, Captain Senez and his officers followed the example of the American officers and removed their hats, as did the French seamen. The French Republic had abolished God, but not a few of the French sailors could be seen to cross themselves as the solemn prayers proceeded. When Captain Little came to the impressive sentence, "We therefore commit his body to the deep," he stopped and nodded his head. The men inboard lifted the end of the grating, a third drew away the flag, and the body of the sailor in the hammock slid gently along the grating, dropped over the side, and plunged beneath the quiet water.

One after another of the French and American seamen were dropped overboard in the same way, the only difference being that the French were covered with the tricolor, their own flag, which had been taken from the *Le Berceau*. The captain repeated the committal sentence for each one in succession, friend and enemy faring impartially at his hands.

In a short time all of the dead had been launched into the deep except the body of the woman. With

COMMITTED TO THE GREAT DEEP

tender gentleness the rough seamen lifted the slight, slender figure. Reverently they laid the small form upon the grating. Captain Little opened his mouth for the last time to repeat the few loving sentences by which he had consigned each one of the others, when a thought struck him. He stopped, turned to his executive officer, whispered a moment :

“ Mr. Dickinson, as this is the baby’s mother we ought to have him here. I only hope he’ll have sense enough to behave himself. Send one of the midshipmen below and have Lang bring him up.”

The crew waited curiously, wondering what was to happen, while the midshipman ran aft and disappeared in the cabin. Presently Lang came on deck with the poor little baby in his arms. The midshipman had explained the situation, and there was no necessity for words. The captain motioned him, and Lang stepped over beside the grating. The old man looked very stern and resolute as he silently took the indicated place and lifted the child straight up in his arms. The baby, which had been fed again with the cook’s decoction, which seemed to agree marvellously well with it, laughed and cooed and then innocently and unconsciously reached out its little hands toward the body of its mother lying under the flag. Perhaps the little chap was attracted by the bright colors. The captain would fain give the unknown woman the same honors as he gave his brave men who had fallen fighting for their country.

IN THE WASP'S NEST

Lang stepped closer and held the baby nearer, so that for a few moments its little hand lay upon the face of its dead mother in the hammock under the ensign.

It was a sad moment indeed. Little Mr. Blakely, who had seen the face of the poor woman, sniffled audibly. Mr. Talcott turned his gaze out to sea. Some of the younger men among the crew lifted the backs of their hands furtively to their eyes. Captain Little coughed violently, as, in a voice that lacked its usual steadiness, he read the committal sentence.

Slowly, with a lingering and reluctant movement, the men lifted the grating. The slight body slipped quickly from it, flashed in the air as the last rays of the setting sun, streaming low from the western horizon, fell upon it, parted the water with a gentler splash than the heavier men had caused, gleamed on the wave a moment, and then sank out of sight in the darkness of the great deep. The men who had followed its departure with eager gaze watched it drop through the air, and disappear from their vision.

There was a moment of strange silence on the ship, broken by a feeble cry from the little child in the arms of the old sailor.

"Strike the bell four!" cried the captain, sternly, putting on his hat and turning away. "Call the port watch!"

So the log of the sea waif was begun.

CHAPTER VII

BILLY BOWLINE BEARS A HAND

THE next morning was bright and sunny. Contrary to the captain's nervous anticipation, the baby had slept quietly throughout the night. Lang had rigged up a small hammock for it, and, in mortal terror lest his charge might disturb the captain, he had spent most of the night awake swinging it gently whenever the child stirred. The hammock proved a comfortable bed for the tired little youngster, and, having had plenty to eat before it went to sleep, it slept like a top. The pleasant surprise which its seemly conduct gave to the captain put him in a gentler, more complaisant mood, and Lang shrewdly took advantage of it to ask him if he might not have one of the ship's boys detailed to act as his assistant.

"Ye see, yer honor," he said, "I don't dare to leave this yere babby alone a minute, an' in course as I can't mess in the cabin I won't have no way to git my meals onless I has some one to stan' watch with me, sir."

"So you want to introduce another jackie into the cabin, do you? You want to turn my cabin into a

IN THE WASP'S NEST

lounging room for the crew, do you? Perhaps you think this is the fo'ke'sl, sir?"

"No, sir, not on no account, sir. I jest wants to be helped out a bit, sir."

"And I suppose, if I grant your request, you and he will be gabbling all day, sir, over this infant; and I won't know my soul's my own betwixt ye!"

"No, yer honor. I knows too well the respect due to the cabin, sir—an' the cap'n, too, sir," he added, quickly. "An' bein' a silent man myself, never sayin' no more'n is necessary on no account, w'ich my old woman she didn't never lemme open my mouth ashore, an' I had to larn there the wirtue of silence, I won't say nothin' to disturb yer honor, an' I won't let no one else do it, nuther."

"Lang," said the captain, "I'd back you against the whole crew for talking. I suppose you could talk them all down without any trouble. That's one qualification for a nurse you possess. You'll teach the infant to talk, if anybody can."

"Yes, sir, I'll try, sir."

"How is he now?"

"Seems werry well, sir."

"I didn't hear him during the night."

"He never opened his mouth the hull time, sir. I'm larnin' him to behave in the cabin."

"Is he still asleep?"

"Yes, sir. Shall I rouse him out?"

"On no account," answered the captain, timorously. "You may take advantage of his quietness

BILLY BOWLINE BEARS A HAND

to go forward and pick out your boy and bring him here and turn him to. Then get your breakfast an' I'll see what's to be done later."

"I 'spose I won't have to go to quarters so long's I'm promoted to be bo's'n's mate to this yere young gentleman?"

"Oh, I suppose not," said Captain Little, laughing at the solemn old man. "The care of one baby ought to be enough for one able-bodied man and a ship's boy."

"Yes, sir. An' I means to take keer of this yere babby in fine shape. I didn't bargain for no dooty of this kind, but since I've been detailed to take keer on him, I've been dewotin' myself to doin' it, an' I'm goin' to keep on if——"

"Get out of the cabin!" said the captain, in a low, fierce whisper, subdued for fear of waking the baby, "and bear a hand too!"

When the "old man," as the captain was called, spoke in that manner, everyone knew that the limit of his forbearance had been reached. Lang therefore darted forward at once and soon found himself on the forecastle in the midst of the crew. He was an object of the most intense interest on account of his new duties, his relationship to the baby, and his place in the cabin. The men could not resist the opportunity of baiting him a little, and their baiting took the form of rather coarse jests. Lang bore it all good-humoredly within certain limits, but when they got beyond his powers of endurance he quietly

IN THE WASP'S NEST

put down his pannik'in of steaming coffee, rose to his feet, grasped each of the two most serious offenders by the back of the neck, and knocked their heads together in a peculiarly effective manner.

"Ye ask wot qualifications I've got fer nussin' that babby, messmates," he roared, bringing them together with a violent shake. "This is one of 'em. Ye want to know how I know how to soothe a babby, do ye? Bless ye, this is the way I'll do it!"

Bang! Crack! The two heads came together again and again, while the rest of the crew roared. The men struggled unavailing in the arms of the giant sailor until, having exhausted his wrath, he released his grasp on them and they fell to the deck, almost stunned by the shaking and banging they had received.

"Look yere," resentfully growled one of them, sitting up and rubbing his head, "if you're goin' to soothe that youngster this yere way there won't be nothin' left of him. 'Taint no way to treat a man, let alone a babby," he muttered, ruefully.

"I want ye to know one thing, shipmates," said Lang, pulling out his pipe and disdaining to notice the objects of his last experiment, "this yere babby is a born gentleman. He's no fo'ke'sl lubber like you. -I'm proud to nuss him. W'en he grows up he'll be the biggest man in the United States. Specially after gettin' such trainin' as I'll give him. I'll make a seaman out of him, me an' the cap'n will."

BILLY BOWLINE BEARS A HAND

The sailor smiled good-naturedly as he spoke, and joined in the general laugh with which this modest assertion was greeted.

"As fer bein' a nuss fer the child, if anybody's got anythin' more to say ag'in it let 'em speak out an' we'll settle it an' have no more fuss about it. I've been tendin' the infant all night, an' I never felt so much like fightin' in all my life."

Nobody seemed inclined, in the presence of the mighty sinews of the sailor and the demonstration he had just given the unlucky pair who had first felt his prowess, to avail himself of the opportunity to discuss the propriety of his action.

"Besides, it is a promotion. I'm to git a bo's'n's mate's pay, be let off from watch an' quarters, sleep in the cabin like the other two gentlemen there, the cap'n an' the babby. I'm to have a fust luff, too! You, Billy Bowline, I guess I'll take ye."

"Good Lord, sir!" stammered Billy Bowline, one of the ship's powder boys, in great dismay; "don't—take—me—me, sir! I—I—never had nothin'—to—to—do with babies!"

"Ye won't have nuthin' to do with this yere babby nuther, only obeyin' my orders. Y' ain't to tech the infant, so fer as that goes. Y' ain't knowin' enough. There's jest one thing I want to tell ye. Don't ye answer back to nobody, to me or the cap'n, or I don't know wot'll become of ye! I don't want no talkative pussens round me, bein' such a silent man myself ordinarily, an' the cap'n

IN THE WASP'S NEST

he thinks the same way as me. Have ye had yer breakfast?"

"Yes, sir," wailed the boy. "I don't want to keer for no child, Mr. Lang. I don't know how."

"I'll larn ye all ye need to know. Now, you come along aft with me, an' mind yer eye. I've got a colt handy, an' I want to tell ye that w'enever that there infant strikes up a tune an' disturbs me an' the cap'n you gits licked."

"Oh, Lord, sir! I—didn't ship—fer this babby!"

"Shut up, ye young imp! Stop argyfyin' an' remember you've got to larn to call the babby a young gentleman, w'ich he is, by the cap'n's orders. Now aft with ye!" roared Lang, grabbing the lad by the back of the neck and the seat of his trousers and rushing him below to the captain's cabin.

"Back again, Lang?" asked the captain.

"Yes, sir."

"Is that the boy?"

"Yes, sir," answered the sailor, swinging young Billy, who was vainly trying to seek shelter behind his captor, into view.

"Um!" said the captain, looking over him critically, "what qualifications has he for a nurse?"

"Sir," said Lang, "a gentle dispersition, a love fer children, an' he wants to larn. Ain't that so, Billy?" shaking him gently but tightening his grasp ominously.

"Ye—yes, sir."

"An' he's the silentest boy on the hull ship, sir.

BILLY BOWLINE BEARS A HAND

Him an' me an' you an' the babby'll get along fine an'——"

"No more!" roared the captain, glaring fiercely at him, and turning to the boy. "Remember one thing! Have nothing to say to the captain, or the officers, or anybody! This talking is the ruination of discipline. If you have anything to say, don't say it! It's a safe rule on a ship! Lang, I want you to set him an example of keeping quiet."

"Yes, sir. Ye kin depend upon me, sir. I never was known——"

"Well, begin now. What are you going to do with the baby now?"

"I was thinkin' it'd be a good thing to give him a wash down, sir, an' then a feed. I s'pose he hain't had no bath fer a week. I guess I kin have a division tub, sir?"

"Oh, yes, certainly," responded the captain sarcastically, "anything you want. Turn this cabin into a swimming-pool if you like. I'm here only on sufferance. This baby seems to run the ship with you as first luff."

"Yes, sir. Billy, bring me a small division tub an' put it in the berth there. He must have fresh water, of course, sir," he added, "so long's he's a young gentleman, an' messes aft."

"Great heavens!" cried the captain. "Why, I don't get fresh water myself to take a bath in!"

"Oh, but in course, sir, this yere's such a little babby."

IN THE WASP'S NEST

"Oh, well, have it your own way."

Presently the division tub was brought in and filled with fresh water tempered to the proper heat by some hot water Billy fetched from the galley. Master Ned was undressed and deftly plunged therein by his nurse, who was rapidly losing his awkwardness, while Billy stood watching him with delight.

"Ye see, Billy," said Lang, as he soused the infant in the tub, "it's all in havin' confidence in one's self. W'en I fust tackled this yere kid I felt mighty strange, but jest as soon as I larned the ropes an' canvas of his gearin' an' how he was tacked an' box-hauled, I begun to git confidence ag'in, an' now I'm jest as much at home with him as I'd be on a tops'l yard. Pay attention to wot I say, Billy, an' you'll know a bit. It's a pity I ain't more talkative, but I've allus been a silent man. Lord, look at the young gentleman a-splashin' round! He's wallerin' an' blowin' like a young w'ale! T'aint the first time this yere babby's been in the water. He's been raised right, an' I knowed it. I tole the cap'n so."

He continued soliloquizing in this strain while he washed the delighted child. The captain was writing his report in his cabin beyond. He could not help overhearing some of the confusion which was made and finally with a look of annoyance he rose to his feet and stepped toward the berth in which the ablutions were being performed. Lang detected his footstep quickly.

BILLY BOWLINE BEARS A HAND

"Billy," he cried to the astonished boy, "wot d'ye mean by mutterin' to yerself in this way? You'll have our cap'n——"

"Why—Mr.—Mr.—Lan—g!" began the boy, "I was—s—n't——"

"There, there! Are ye goin' to answer me back? Jest wait till I git through with this young gentleman. You'll have that good kind cap'n of ourn——"

At that moment Captain Little stuck his head in the doorway, a ferocious expression on his face.

"I'm jest a-ratin' Billy, yer honor. I'm afraid he's disturbin' the atmosphere aft with his mutterin' here. He's begun to talk some."

"Dash my wig!" exclaimed the captain, laughing in spite of himself, "the atmosphere of this cabin with you in it would make anyone talk. How is the infant enjoying his bath?"

"Wery well, sir. Jest look at him a-splashin' round, sir. He takes to the water as nateral as a duck, sir. We'll make an admiral out of him yet, you an' me, sir."

The captain leaned over the tub and looked kindly at the baby, who was thoroughly enjoying the unwonted luxury of his bath. The child was splashing with his hands and laughing and cooing in happy pleasure. The captain's stern face softened as he gazed down at the little sea waif. Except that he was thin from exposure and deprivation he noted that he was a very well-made child.

IN THE WASP'S NEST

"They make quite a pretty picture," thought Midshipman Blakely timorously, coming into the cabin, after knocking several times without attracting any attention. Nobody noticed him and he did not know just what to do. Finally he coughed diplomatically behind his hand, and the captain looked up. He reddened with confusion at being found in this position. Mr. Blakely reported that a sail had been sighted, and was directed shortly to return on deck.

"Don't keep him too long in the water, Lang," said Captain Little, as he left the berth and followed the midshipman.

"Now, who'd 'a' thought it," muttered old Lang to himself, "that the ol' man would take such an int'rest in this yere infant. Dash my pigtail, but I s'pose afore we gits through this cruise nobody'll know who is takin' care of this baby, him er me. Take the division tub away, Billy, an' heave the water overboard. Then tell the cook to pick me out a nice fat piece of salt-pork—cabin-pork, too. I think he's old enough to chew suthin! We can't keep this yere infant on lobsouse all his life, which is poor stuff for a growin' man. I take it he must be 'bout a year old now. I wonder if he's got any teeth? Lemme feel."

He stuck his huge finger into the baby's mouth, much to the latter's disgust, and counted "one, two, three, four!"

"He must have somethin' to chew on sartain."

BILLY BOWLINE BEARS A HAND

Wow!" he exclaimed as the infant bit fiercely upon the horny finger, "his jaw tackle's all right. It runs free an' easy," he added, withdrawing his hand and wiping the beginnings of a smile from Billy's face with a ferocious glare.

CHAPTER VIII

THE COMMODORE FURNISHES A GOAT

THE sail they had seen was a large white one. She was now headed toward them and was coming down fast. By Captain Little's direction the *Boston* had been kept away, when she had been first sighted, but the stranger had the heels of her and rapidly overhauled her. The *Boston*, a very swift vessel, was unable to carry a press of canvas on account of a badly wounded foremast, else she could not have been so easily overhauled.

At first the men on the *Boston* had watched the strange sail approach with some apprehension, which changed to delight as they made out unmistakable signs which told them that she was a ship-of-war of their own country. In a very short time they had drawn sufficiently near to distinguish the flag at the gaff end and the broad pennant of a commodore at the mast-head. At first they thought it might be the doughty Truxtun in the *Constellation*, but the ship approaching was seen to be too heavy for that already famous frigate, and they finally decided that it must be Commodore John Barry, the commander-in-chief on the frigate *United States*.

As they neared each other the *United States* hove

THE COMMODORE FURNISHES A GOAT

to, clewed up her fore royal, and set a string of signals, in obedience to which Captain Little swept his ship around the stern of the great frigate, and the *Boston* ranged along the lee side and close aboard when she also hove to with nice and beautiful seamanship. The two ships lay gently rocking in the smooth sea quite near enough to one another to render conversation easy. The old commodore was standing aft on the poop deck, surrounded by his officers.

"Ahoy the *Boston*!" he cried.

"Ahoy the *United States*!" answered Little, promptly. "How is the commodore?"

"Very well, thank you, sir. You look as if you had been in action, Captain Little."

"We have, sir."

"When? Where?"

"Day before yesterday we encountered a French ship, *Le Berceau*, in latitude $22^{\circ} 55'$ North, longitude 51° West."

"What became of her?"

"We captured her after a running fight of twenty-four hours."

The men of the *United States* who had listened to this conversation broke into cheers at this stirring announcement.

"Having completely dismasted her," continued Little, as soon as he could be heard, "we repaired her as well as we could, finding she could be made seaworthy, and sent her off to St. Kitts with a prize crew."

IN THE WASP'S NEST

"Well done, sir," cried the commodore. "I congratulate you! Had you any serious loss?"

"We had four killed and eleven wounded, sir, most of whom are doing well. The French ship had four killed and seventeen wounded. The rest of her crew are now aboard the *Boston*."

"Did you suffer any serious damage?"

"Yes, sir. We were badly cut up. There is a shot in the foremast that greatly weakens it."

"I think you would better run into St. Kitts, Captain Little. Repair as well as you can, and then take your prize back to the United States. What's your port?"

"Boston, sir."

"Well, sir, get the two ships in shape, and make the best of your way there. Your people deserve a little reward for their gallantry. By gad, sir, I wish we had such luck! We've a ship full of young men eager to distinguish themselves, and we have not seen a thing bigger than a privateer."

"Thank you, commodore," said Captain Little. "The men will be delighted to get back to the United States. Three cheers for Commodore Barry, all you Bostons!"

Instantly the rails of the *Boston* swarmed with delighted men, who rent the air with cheers for the old Revolutionary commodore, which he acknowledged with a graceful wave of his hat. As the tumult subsided Little spoke again.

THE COMMODORE FURNISHES A GOAT

"By the way, commodore, have you a cow on board?"

"A cow, sir? What d'ye mean?"

"An animal—anything that gives milk, I mean, sir."

"Milk? Is this a jest, Captain Little? If so, 'tis most ill timed," shouted the old Irishman, crimson with anger. "Silence fore and aft the decks!" he roared as he detected tittering among the crews.

"No, sir," cried Captain Little, hastily; "we have—er—got a baby on board."

"A what!"

"A baby, sir."

"Are you running an orphan asylum, Captain Little, or are you mad, sir?" asked the commodore, severely.

"No, sir. The *Berceau* picked up a castaway, a woman and a baby, in an open boat a few days before the action. One of our shot unfortunately killed the woman before she was able to give much account of herself. After we took the French vessel we thought it best to bring the infant aboard us, sir, and we've nothing but ship's food to feed it. That's why I want a cow, sir."

"We have no cow, but we have a goat that gives milk."

"If you would give her to us—if you would sell her to us, we'd be very grateful, sir."

"Would it not be better to send the baby over to us? We have the larger vessel, and——"

IN THE WASP'S NEST

"Well, you see, sir," said the captain, hesitating, "the fact is—er—er—as we are getting along so nicely together—we are very fond of it, sir," he added, desperately. "You have just ordered us back to the United States, sir, and I think I would better take it there and give it to some female and have it properly attended to as soon as possible."

Captain Little turned very red as he made this confession. He glanced furiously at his officers and men on the deck, but nobody on the *Boston* cracked a smile, although the *United States* rang with laughter. To tell the truth the whole ship's company were so deeply interested in the baby that they would have been almost ready to fight any attempt to deprive them of it. Jack Lang and Billy Bowline in particular listened in great anxiety for the answer. The commodore hung in the wind a moment, undecided, but finally called out :

"Very good, Captain Little. Take the two prizes back to the United States, *Le Berceau* and the baby, the cradle and the infant. Ha, ha ! Mr. Decatur, and you, Mr. Jones, put that goat aboard the second cutter and transfer her to the *Boston*."

Kicking and bleating, the goat was tied and put into the boat, the cutter was dropped into the water, and Mistress Nanny, protesting with all her might, was transshipped to the *Boston*. Decatur and Jones, the two midshipmen, received permission from Captain Little to see the baby, toward whose future

THE COMMODORE FURNISHES A GOAT

nourishment they had contributed so materially by bringing over the commodore's goat.

"I wish we had him on our ship," said Decatur. "It would be mighty amusing, wouldn't it? To play with it and so on? Well, we'll never see him again, poor little beggar."

"As for me," said Jones, already a man in years in spite of the fact that he had just been warranted a midshipman, "I expect to see him again. I, for one, am going to keep in touch with him. Blakely," he added to the midshipman, who had accompanied them below with the captain's permission, "I wish you'd write to me and keep me informed as to this infant. I feel interested in him. What do you call him?"

"Ned," answered Blakely. "'N. E. D.' were the initials on the locket that was found about his neck."

"What's his last name?"

"He hasn't any. We don't know, that is."

"You know I think the child ought to be baptized," said Jones, gravely. He was a very thoughtful, staid young man.

"He certainly ought," said Decatur, eagerly catching at the idea. He was a strong Episcopalian, by the way.

"I wish you would suggest to the commodore to have our 'Holy Joe'"—the midshipman name for the chaplain—"baptize him before we part company. The baby, I mean, not the 'old man,'" continued Jones.

IN THE WASP'S NEST

"I think it would be a splendid idea, but I would not like to be the one to ask it myself," answered Decatur, hesitating.

"Nuther'd I," chimed in old Jack Lang, who was of course present, jealously watching over his charge.

"Well, I will do it, Jones," said Decatur, finally, "if you'll back me up."

"Certainly I will," assented the older man.

"Captain Little," said the audacious young Decatur, saluting the captain, as he went on deck a moment later, "don't you think it would be well to have the baby baptized by the chaplain of the *United States* before we part company?"

"Very good idea, Mr. Decatur," said the captain, looking at the handsome young midshipman with approval.

"And, sir," added Jones, "I heard the chaplain say, before we came off, that he would like to baptize it for you if you wanted it done."

CHAPTER IX

MASTER NED IS WELL SPONSORED

"WELL, Mr. Jones, do you and Mr. Decatur return to the *United States*, present my compliments to the commodore and tell him I would like to borrow Chaplain Bates for a few moments to christen our sea waif. If he cares to come over himself I shall be most happy to receive him, I am sure. Mr. Jones, tell the commodore if it would be agreeable to him that I would like you and Mr. Decatur to return also since you have shown so much interest in the—er—performance. Mr. Dickinson," continued the captain, turning to his first lieutenant, as the delighted midshipmen saluted and scampered away toward the boat, "we—er—we ought to have some sponsors or god-parents, I understand, on occasions of this kind?"

"Yes, sir," promptly answered Dickinson, who was also a Churchman; "we should have at least two men and one woman for a boy baby."

"Um!" said the captain, "we'll have to get along without the woman, I expect, unless that garrulous old Jack Lang will act for her."

"He will hardly do for that, sir, I fancy," said Dickinson, laughing.

IN THE WASP'S NEST

"No, I suppose not. Well, the question is, who shall be godfathers for the poor little fellow?"

"Well, sir, everybody on the ship is greatly interested in that infant. I think it would be well to make it a general affair and call all hands to stand sponsor, as it were."

"Um!" said the captain, meditatively. "I might have one from the crew, one from the steerage, one from the ward-room, and——"

"And one from the cabin," said Dickinson, adroitly divining what was in the captain's mind.

"Yes, quite so, quite so. Now who'll they be?"

"Lang from the crew, I'd suggest, sir."

"Yes, he, of course. And from the steerage?"

"Mr. Blakely, since he has been mixed up from the beginning in the affair."

"And from the ward-room?"

"Well, sir, I thought that I, being first lieutenant——"

"Excuse me, Dickinson," broke in Talcott, who had overheard the whole conversation, "I think that right belongs to me. I found him and took care of him for the first part of his cruise with us, and——"

"Quite right, Mr. Talcott. Quite right," suavely remarked Captain Little. "I think, Mr. Dickinson, that Mr. Talcott has the superior claim, and with myself that will be ample. If he can't have a woman godmother, he'll have two additional men.

MASTER NED IS WELL SPONSORED

Not that two additional men would make up for one woman, of course."

"Beg pardon, sir," said Midshipman Sterrett, who was on watch, coming up and touching his cap. "Commodore Barry is coming off to the *Boston* in his gig."

"What's that!" said the captain, hurriedly. "Mr. Murphy, parade the marine guards at once, sir. Beat to quarters immediately, Mr. Dickinson. Keep all fast in the batteries when the men get to their stations. Boatswain's mate, stand by to pipe the side."

Old Commodore Barry was as great a stickler for the observance due to his rank and station as was Little himself, and the commander of the *Boston* omitted none of the ceremonious preparations required by the regulations to receive his superior. To the accompaniment of the shrilling of the pipes of the boatswain's mates, the stout old sea-dog panted up the side, stepped over the gangway through a line of side boys, and was greeted ceremoniously by the captain and the officers who had speedily assembled, while the drums ruffled and the small marine guard drawn up in line on the quarter-deck presented arms.

"Great honor, I am sure, to welcome you on the *Boston*. Three cheers for Commodore Barry, lads!" cried the captain, waving his hat.

"I wanted to see that precious infant of yours, Little," responded the commodore, rolling aft along

IN THE WASP'S NEST

the deck as the cheers died away. He spoke with a slight brogue which betrayed his Irish ancestry, and was delightful to listen to. "And here's our good chaplain," he added, as he saw that functionary coming through the gangway. The clergyman was attired in cassock and bands, and carried his Prayer Book.

"Where is—er—the infant?" asked the commodore, after the captain had greeted the chaplain, who was closely followed by Midshipman Decatur and Midshipman Jones.

"He is below yet, sir. I did not think it necessary to disturb him until——"

"Gad, sir!" roared the commander, laughing loudly. "I suppose you'll never dare to have target practice or general quarters on the ship unless that infant is awake and ready. It's a good thing I ordered you back to the United States, or this ship would be commanded by a baby."

"Oh, not so bad as that, commodore," answered Little, "though, as a matter of fact, when I get down into my cabin I hardly know who commands, Jack Lang or young Ned."

"Oh, that's his name, is it?"

"Well, you see, he wore a little locket—here it is, by the way—on which are these three letters, 'N. E. D.' That's the picture of his mother," said the captain, pressing the spring and opening the locket.

"Ha!" said Barry, "upon me soul, 'tis a lovely

MASTER NED IS WELL SPONSORED

face. Poor lady! God rest her soul, whoever she may be! And you know nothing about her?"

"Nothing, except that she is dead."

"Well, well. I hardly believe you'll ever find anything about her then."

"I suppose not," said Little. "But the baby will be well taken care of. They were evidently gentle people."

"Quite so. No doubt of it from this, I should say," added the commodore. "Well, Dr. Bates, are you ready to christen the child?"

"I shall do it with pleasure, Commodore Barry, but hypothetically, of course."

"Oh, anyway, so that it is done. I do not presume to interfere in ecclesiastical matters on the ship, or to know the meaning of the words even, though, by gad, everything else must be referred to the commodore."

"Of course, sir," answered the chaplain.

"Mr. Dickinson," said Captain Little, "direct the men to assemble in the gangways, hats off, and keep quiet. We are going to christen the baby."

"All hands muster in the gangways!" roared the boatswain's mates, "to christen the baby!"

The men came to their appointed places with a great deal of solemnity, as if they did not quite know what was going to happen.

"I have appointed a sponsor or godfather from the crew, one from the steerage, one from the ward-

IN THE WASP'S NEST

room, and—er—myself from the cabin,” explained the captain, nervously.

“Well, sir,” answered the commodore, “those are ample, I am sure ; and while I belong to another faith from that of our good Dr. Bates here, and some of the rest of you, if you will allow me I will stand godfather, too.”

“Please, sir,” said Decatur, who had edged nearer, “may not the old *United States* have representatives in this affair, too? Mr. Jones and me?”

“Well, we don’t want two midshipmen from the frigate,” said the commodore, smiling at the boy, who was a great favorite of his. “You or Mr. Jones, one of you——”

“I think, commodore,” broke in the chaplain, “that it would better be Mr. Jones. He is—er—more sedate than Mr. Decatur.”

“Oh, chaplain,” pleaded Decatur, eagerly, “you don’t want to have all his godfathers sedate. Look at the list already,” he went on audaciously.

“I think it will do no harm,” said Captain Little, smiling at the boy, “to have both of these young gentlemen, so if you are all agreed we will produce the infant and begin. Mr. Talcott, Mr. Blakely, if you will gather around me you can read from my prayer-book.”

“And the other gentlemen can read over my shoulder,” said the chaplain.

Presently Master Ned, looking white and clean and happy after his bath and his meal, and dressed

MASTER NED IS WELL SPONSORED

in a nondescript garment which Lang had just fashioned with the assistance of some other horny-handed needleman among the crew, and of which they were inordinately proud, was brought on deck.

In this instance he was carried in the arms of Billy Bowline. Lang, who had heard that he was to be one of the godfathers, did not deem it in accordance with his new dignity to bear the infant on such an occasion. For once the old sailor was quite abashed amid all the array of rank and talent in which he was suddenly thrust, and for once in his life he kept still.

He stood back of the two officers near the captain, his great size enabling him to see over their shoulders and to read the responses, had it not been that he had ever been slow of study and was not apt to read anything without laborious and long-continued effort in private to master details. However, he solemnly nodded his head in confirmation of the responses read by the officers, and Master Edward, with the formula, "Edward, if thou hast not already been baptized, I baptize thee in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," was duly launched on the sea of ecclesiastical life.

And remembering the old idea that the old Adam is not washed out of a silent recipient of baptism, the officers and crew were mightily pleased that the baby roared lustily when the cold sea-water was poured upon his head—all, that is,

IN THE WASP'S NEST

except Billy Bowline, who stood very red and uncomfortable, holding the shrieking baby in his arms.

By direction of Captain Little in default of a family name they attached the name of the ship to his baptismal appellation, and Ned Boston he became and Ned Boston he remained until the end of his story.

CHAPTER X

HOW THE CREW REMEMBERED THE BABY

IT was the 15th of November when Master Ned Boston laid eyes upon his native land. By unanimous consent he had been declared to be an American. There was no real assurance about it, but the ship's company had accepted his Americanism as a matter of course, and they would have fiercely resented any imputations which would call it in question. At any rate he had been captured by American sailors, fed by American sailors, clothed by American sailors, and sponsored by them, and as Jack Lang sapiently remarked, in his infrequent visits to the forecastle, where he had become the object of inexpressible envy to the rest of the crew, "Now if that don't make him an American, I puts it to ye, ship-mates, wot does it make him?"

Under the sailor's watchful care, stimulated by the vigilant supervision of the captain and of the officers of the ship and the crew, so far as they were able to exert it, Master Ned Boston had thriven exceedingly. The goat's milk, with the several delectable compounds which the culinary skill of the cook had evolved with that fluid as the basis, had

IN THE WASP'S NEST

been very agreeable to the young man's taste. No one would have recognized, in the fat, rosy-cheeked, good-natured, hardy little baby, the weak, fretful, starved infant who had been taken from the French ship.

The *Boston*, with flags and bunting flying from every masthead, was slowly making her way up the inner harbor. In her wake came her prize, *Le Berceau*, her jury masts covered with flags, the stars and stripes waving over the French tricolor. The advent of a captured vessel of war of the enemy, in after years a common occurrence, was novel in that day, and the popular enthusiasm was correspondingly great. Captain Little and his officers in full uniform, and the crew in their best clothes, proudly surveyed such a scene of animation as Boston Harbor had not often witnessed. The harbor was full of boats from the ships anchored or tied up at the wharves, flags were flying, guns booming, bells were ringing, and tokens of joy were in evidence on every hand. Amid the cheers of thousands of the good citizens the ship finally came to anchor and its cruise was over.

"To think," said Jack Lang, standing in the fore-castle, holding the baby, wrapped in a fur jacket belonging to the captain, tightly in his arms, turning to the members of the crew stationed there who surrounded him—"to think of all this yere commotion bein' made to welcome this young gentleman w'ich I holds in my arms!" Which showed the im-

THE CREW REMEMBERED THE BABY

portance to which his youthful protégé had attained in the old sailor's mind.

"Wot's goin' to happen to him w'en we gits paid off?" asked the captain of the forecastle.

"Cap'n Little's goin' to take him to his own home w'ich he ain't got no children of his own an' he wants this one."

"An' then you won't see him no more?" queried the boatswain's mate.

"I wouldn't give up this child," answered Lang, solemnly, "fer no cap'n noways. I goes with him. Cap'n Little he sez he wants me to take charge of him. Of course we'll have to turn him over to the wimmin folks some, I guess, but I'm goin' to remove my ol' woman down to Cap'n Little's place near Boston, an' him and me's going to superwise the eddication an' trainin' of this yere kid to be a fust-class sailorman."

"I'm goin' along too," said Billy Bowline, piping up anxiously.

"Ye are, are ye?" asked Lang, scowling ferociously at the boy, "well, ye'll have to learn not to talk so much then. Why, I never saw a boy with such a gift of gab! As the cap'n speakin' sez, 'He's got gab enough and unstoppered lingo stowed away in his lockers to out-talk a feemale academy.'"

"Why—Mr. Lang—he—said—that—to—"

"There ye go ag'in! Hain't I told ye? Will ye never larn nuthin'? If I didn't have this yere babby in my arms I'd give ye a lesson! If ye say

IN THE WASP'S NEST

another word to me till the fust dog watch, I'll break you an' send you forward ter the fo'ke'sl ag'in. Lift yerself, Master Ned, an' look at yer native land!" cried the old man, holding the baby up, and it was in that way that Master Ned Boston ended his cruise and got his first glimpse of the United States.

One more incident in his early career may be chronicled. The *Boston* was paid off at once, and Captain Little, already an elderly man and generously willing that one of his brother officers should have a chance at sea service, voluntarily relinquished his command. That he intended to adopt the baby was well known to the officers and crew. He was a man possessed of means of his own, and, being without children, his action was in every way suitable. The baby of course had nothing, and although the papers of Boston printed its story and the news gradually filtered throughout the land, nothing was ever learned about its parentage thereby.

Everybody had grown to love the little chap, and the thought in everybody's mind was to give it something—to make it a present before parting from it.

The usual practice when a ship was paid off was for everybody to leave it at the earliest possible moment and never come back to it, but after the men were paid off that morning it was noticed that they acted very strangely. For one thing they did not immediately abandon the ship. There was a great deal of conversation and consultation going on for-

THE CREW REMEMBERED THE BABY

ward in the forecastle, and finally a deputation visited the captain.

"If yer honor pleases," said the old captain of the after guard, who headed the men, "we—we—have jest been paid off—an' we want to make some little present to Master Ned, sir, so we thought, sir, as mebbe you mought be willin' to let us, each one of us, give a conterbution w'ich you kin put aside fer him from us, bein' as he's the ship's babby."

"Men," said the captain, deeply touched by this spontaneously generous proposal, "your sentiments do you credit."

"Beg pardon, Cap'n," said the jack-of-the-dust, vaguely disconcerted by the latter word, "but we means this to be a cash transaction. No credit about it, sir."

"I know, I know, I understand," said the captain, smiling, "but I hardly think that will be necessary. I don't mind telling you that I intend to adopt him, and, as I am blessed with plenty of this world's goods, he will want for nothing." Observing the look of disappointment in the faces of the old tars before him, he continued, hastily: "You might make him some little present to remember you all by. I think it would be better than money."

"Wery good, sir," said the captain of the after guard, "me an' my messmates'll report this to the rest o' the crew an' then we'll see wot we kin do. With yer honor's permission, sir, we'll go ashore an' come back this artemnoon arter we gits through."

IN THE WASP'S NEST

"All right," said the captain. "I'll keep Master Ned here until you return."

The officers of the deck and the midshipmen of the watch, for the colloquy had taken place on deck, immediately conceived a similar idea. There were many discussions in the wardroom and steerage that morning, and it was finally decided that the most acceptable gifts from the officers would be in the shape of clothing to replenish the scanty ship-made wardrobe of the waif.

The ship was deserted that afternoon except by the keepers appointed to take charge of her from the Navy Yard, and Captain Little, Lang, Billy Bowline, and the baby. About four bells, just at the end of the second dog watch, the men came trooping back, for a wonder, clean and sober to a man. They marched solemnly aboard the ship, assembled in the gangway in orderly ranks, and notified the captain that they awaited his pleasure. He came on deck at once, followed by Lang and the baby. The captain of the after guard, the captain of the foretop, and the jack-of-the-dust solemnly advanced to the capstan bearing a huge box, which, when opened, was found to contain an immense silver punch-bowl. It had been purchased as an appropriate present for the baby by the combined effort of the crew!

"Good Lord!" whispered Lang, who was not in the secret, "wot is it? A bath-tub?"

"Cap'n Little, sir," said the captain of the after

THE CREW REMEMBERED THE BABY

guard, shifting his quid and rolling his eyes nervously, after wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, and knuckling his forehead, "Arter discussing this matter thoroughly we concluded to give Master Ned this yere punch-bowl, w'ich, of course, we knows he ain't drinkin' punch yit, but there's no tellin' how soon he'll be, an' we wants him to have enough w'en he gits it. W'en he can't git punch, this yere thing'll do fer grog, w'ich is a fine drink fer a sailor, w'ich you means to make out of him. He couldn't be nuthin' else, an' it's our opinion, not bein' as familiar with kids as Jack Lang there, but bein' good seamen an' men of sense, that the quicker he begins on grog the better. Therefore, we presents it to him fer you to keep fer him with our love an' duty, an' we calls your attention to its markin's."

Biting his lip to control his laughter at the singularly inappropriate gift, and yet touched at the display of loving generosity involved in the purchase of the massive piece of silver, Captain Little gravely examined the bowl, which bore this inscription: "To the ship's baby, Master Ned Boston, with the humble duty of his shipmates of the United States sloop-of-war, *Boston*."

"Men," said the captain, "your gift does you proud. In behalf of Master Ned Boston, I thank you for it. It is just what might have been expected from such a fine body of prime seamen and brave fellows as you are. I don't know just when babies commence to drink punch, but as soon as

IN THE WASP'S NEST

the time comes, he shall have his first swallow out of your bowl. Meanwhile I have directed my steward to prepare a tub of that same punch and I want you all to splice the main brace with me to the health of the baby, our little shipmate, Master Ned Boston."

"W'ich we'll do it with pleasure, Cap'n," cried the jack-of-the-dust enthusiastically.

"Shipmates," said the captain of the foretop, piping up, "three cheers for Cap'n Little!"

"An' three cheers for the ship's babby!" added the captain of the after guard.

It was later when the officers assembled to present their gifts. They had spent hours ransacking the Boston shops and came back loaded with strange and unfamiliar, and it must be confessed somewhat inappropriate, fabrics and garments. They had purchased them mainly because of their beauty and costliness, without much regard either to size or utility. There were shoes which were too large, and little boots which were too small; dresses for children three or four years old, and little slips for infants in arms, but they were gravely laid at the feet of Master Boston, with kindly and generous affection and pride.

The officers, mostly recruited from the hard merchant service, were unfamiliar with babies or their clothes, or any of the niceties of life, but they, with the young midshipmen, who knew nothing at all about such matters, had done their best. Happily

THE CREW REMEMBERED THE BABY

there was no woman present to see the ludicrous side of their efforts, and Captain Little, in behalf of his little godson, was duly and correspondingly grateful.

Thus began the shore life of Master Boston, and he might have been considered fortunate in the possession of a huge silver punch-bowl and a miscellaneous assortment of clothing, little of which he could use. These things might not count for much, however, but they meant that he possessed the affection of three hundred officers and men who would never forget him, and many of whom would be brought in contact with him in after years. When to all this were added the devotion of Jack Lang and the determination of the captain to provide for his future, he was certainly the luckiest of little castaways.

CHAPTER XI

THE *WASP* GETS A NEW "REEFER"

ONE pleasant, sunny morning in the early summer of 1812, not quite twelve years after the finding of Master Ned Boston, a sturdy little youngster, wearing a midshipman's roundabout with a long dirk, or midshipman's straight sword, dangling about his small legs, stood on the wharf at the foot of Market Street, Philadelphia, eagerly gazing out at a handsome little full-rigged ship swinging to the ebb in mid-stream before him.

His bright face flushed with pleasure as he looked at her. Not without some experience was he in judging the appearance of ships, as he had spent a large portion of his life in the Boston shipyards; certainly most of his playtime had been passed there, at any rate. Although he was only a lad, he was sufficiently well informed to take in the beautiful lines of the vessel's hull and to mark the wide reach of her spreading yard-arms across her lofty spars. That he was a patriotic little American accounted for the delight with which his eyes dwelt on the new flag rippling out from the gaff end. As he looked he took off his hat and saluted it, smiling buoyantly and brightly as he did so.

THE *WASP* GETS A NEW "REEFER"

At his feet was a small sea-chest. In his breast-pocket, and his hand went to his jacket from time to time to reassure himself of their presence, were two very important papers. One was a long official envelope enclosing a midshipman's warrant in the United States Navy and orders assigning him to the ship before him ; the other a private letter which bore the following superscription :

"To Master-Commandant Jacob Jones, U. S. N., commanding the United States Sloop-of-war *Wasp*."

The letter was from our old friend, Commodore George Little, now living in retirement near Boston in his old age ; and it commended to the care of Captain Jones,* to whose ship the newly made midshipman was attached, the commodore's little adopted son, Master Ned Boston, to whom, indeed, Captain Jones had stood sponsor on the deck of the old *Boston* not twelve years before.

Now Master Ned Boston had enjoyed no practical experience on the sea as yet, although he had lived in an ocean atmosphere upon the seashore. Commodore Little had many times told him of his various cruises, and during the first few years of his life under Commodore Little's roof he had been intimately associated with one Jack Lang, a sailor *filled to the hatches*, as the saying ran, with rare and curious information about distant lands and seas,

* An officer bearing the rank of Master Commandant was invariably called Captain in ordinary intercourse.

IN THE WASP'S NEST

and a seaman unsurpassed in his profession. When Master Ned Boston had been fairly launched upon the sea of life, however, Jack Lang, restless as the born sailor always is, had resigned his position as nurse-in-chief and had drifted out into the seafaring world once more, and though he had come back once or twice between voyages, of late years he had been lost sight of.

Whenever there had been any fighting to be done Lang had been in the thick of it. He had served under Decatur in the Tripolitan War, and it had been easy to keep track of him then, but in the piping times of peace that followed he had been lost sight of.

When the War of 1812 broke out Master Ned Boston pleaded so earnestly with his adopted father to allow him to go to sea that Commodore Little had exerted his influence—which was considerable—to procure for his ward, whom he loved as if he had been his own son, a warrant as a midshipman. He had further bestirred himself to get the boy appointed to the *Wasp*, whose captain he thought highly of as a steady, careful officer, who might, moreover, take a special interest in the very young aspirant for naval glory committed to his care, because of the peculiar part he had taken in that long-ago christening on the *Boston*.

Indeed Captain Jones had been so much interested in the waif that for a time he had maintained a correspondence with Commodore Little concern-

THE *WASP* GETS A NEW "REEFER"

ing him, but the passing years crowded with other duties had prevented him from keeping up the matter, and he had neither seen nor heard from the little boy for many years. He had not forgotten him, however.

There had been some delay in the issuance of the warrant, and Ned's orders to the *Wasp*, which had hurried back from France with despatches when the news of the declaration of war had been received, and she had already completed refitting and overhauling, and was about ready to weigh anchor on her memorable cruise when Ned arrived at Philadelphia, after a long and tedious journey by boat and stage from Boston, by way of New York.

As the boy stood in some perplexity upon the wharf, looking out at the ship, he was hailed by a boatman alongside.

"Good-mornin', young gentleman," said the man from his skiff in the river at the foot of the landing-stairs, "be ye wantin' to git aboard yonder ship?"

"What ship will it be, boatman?" queried the youngster.

"'Tis the United States ship *Wasp*, sir, bound on a cruise. She's been overhaulin' fer several months, an' she's now about ready to weigh."

"That's the ship I want then," returned the boy. "I am warranted a midshipman on board of her," he added with conscious pride.

"Are ye now? Ah, 'tis a lucky ship she is, to have such fine young officers," said the man ingen-

IN THE WASP'S NEST

uously. "Can't I have the pleasure of puttin' yer honor aboard, sir?"

"You can," said the boy, promptly, jumping at the chance. "How much will it be?"

"Well, seein's you're only a midshipman an' jest joinin' it, I'll do it fer a quarter of a dollar."

The regular charge would have been ten cents or a shilling, but Ned was too anxious to join his ship to think of the price, and if the man had asked a dollar he might have had it as easily as the amount designated.

"All right," said the boy, "come up here and get my sea-chest and row me over."

In a few moments the boat swept alongside the starboard gangway and the boatman received his quarter, having first unceremoniously shoved the chest through one of the ports to the deck, and Master Ned climbed up the battens, stepped through the gangway, and found himself for the second time in his life on the deck of an American man-of-war.

His first reception was not particularly cordial. A tall dark man in naval uniform came swiftly toward him, bent his brows and looked down upon him.

"Well, sir," he said, sharply, "who are you?"

"My name is Boston, sir. Ned Boston."

"Good New England name, that," answered the officer, smiling derisively, "and what is your business?"

"I—I am a midshipman, sir," replied the boy, timorously—"in the United States Navy," he con-

THE *WASP* GETS A NEW "REEFER"

tinued, with growing importance as if the announcement of this fact were sure to impress that officer greatly, "and I am ordered to this ship, sir."

"A midshipman, are you?" roared the officer, whose name was Rodgers, scowling at the boy. "Well, sir, what do you mean by coming aboard through the starboard gangway? Don't you know that's reserved for officers?"

"Am I not an officer, sir?" queried the small midshipman, nervously.

"Officer? Great heavens!" ejaculated the man, bursting into provoking laughter. "I don't know what you are. In time you may become an officer, but as to now—why don't you take off your hat and salute, you young cub?" he added, sharply.

"Come, come, Rodgers," interrupted a gentlemanly looking young man coming up through the hatchway while the colloquy was being carried on, "don't frighten the youngster to death."

"I'm not afraid, sir," said the boy, straightening up.

"Good boy!" said the last speaker. "Never be afraid of anything unless it be the captain or your superior officers. What's your name?"

"Boston, sir."

"Boston? That's a queer name."

"It's all I have, sir," said poor Ned, who knew the mystery of his birth, for the commodore had told him all he knew as he hung the locket about his neck, gave him the ring, and bade him good-by,

IN THE WASP'S NEST

"except, of course my Christian name, which is Ned," he added.

"Well, Mr. Boston, so you have been appointed to this ship, have you? Let me see your warrant. I am Mr. Biddle, first lieutenant of the *Wasp*."

"Yes, sir," answered Ned, producing all his documents in his confusion.

"Why, what's this?" exclaimed Biddle, glancing at them. "Mr. Rodgers, this is a letter to Captain Jones. Will you send a midshipman below with this letter?"

"Mr. Holcomb," called out Rodgers to the midshipman of the watch, "take this letter——"

"And these orders, too," interrupted Biddle.

"—to Captain Jones with my compliments, and tell him that Midshipman Boston has come aboard and reports for duty."

"Mr. Van Cleave," added Biddle, turning to another midshipman, much older than our hero, "I place Mr. Boston under your charge. Introduce him to the reefer's mess, and see that he learns the ropes generally."

"Ay, ay, sir," said the lad, touching his cap. Then turning to Ned, "Come along with me, youngster," he said brusquely, but not unkindly.

"Keep him on deck, Mr. Van Cleave," said Biddle. "The captain might wish to see him. By the way, Mr. Boston, how about your dunnage?"

"I have a sea-chest, sir, that was put through one of the windows—port holes, I mean, sir." He hur-

THE *WASP* GETS A NEW "REEFER"

riedly corrected his answer as soon as it escaped him.

"Ports, we generally call them, sir," said Biddle; "ports, Mr. Boston," he continued, in the midst of a general titter from the midshipman and others within earshot. Then noting the dark flush of mortification on the boy's face, who as a matter of fact was quite aware of his harmless little blunder, he added, "'Tis a mistake we are all liable to make. You will make a great many worse ones, Mr. Boston. I'll give you a little advice. Don't be ashamed of your mistakes unless they come from carelessness. Keep your eyes and ears open and do your best to learn, and you will soon be as good a seaman as the rest of us. That is all. Poor little youngster," he said to Rodgers, who was standing watch, as Boston walked timidly forward in the wake of his lordly guide.

"He'll have a hard time before he gets licked into shape," answered the latter. "What under the sun do they send such babies to sea for? Why that boy can't be more than twelve years old, and he is small for his age at that. He ought to be at home in a nursery. He needs the discipline of a female, not a ship."

"George Rodgers," said Biddle, smiling, "if I didn't know you had the best heart in the world and that you're probably going to take this youngster under your own particular wing, I'd think very badly of you."

IN THE WASP'S NEST

"Jim," answered Rodgers, laughing in turn, "what can a man do? By heavens, I haven't forgotten when I was a poor little devil of a midshipman myself, kicked about by every bully in the steerage, and every tyrant on quarter-deck. I may be rough, as you say, because I have the manners of those who broke me in, but that little chap shall have fair play if I've got anything to do with it."

"Captain Jones presents his compliments, sir," said Midshipman Holcomb, coming up to the two officers and touching his cap, "and he would like to see Midshipman Boston in his cabin at once, sir."

"Mr. Van Cleave," called out Rodgers. "Take Mr. Boston into the cabin. The captain wishes to see him. Bo's'n, detail a couple of men to strike Mr. Boston's chest below in the steerage. You'll find it on the deck yonder by number six gun on the starboard side."

"Ay, ay, sir," said Boatswain McCland, as Boston followed the midshipman into the cabin.

He found himself in a small room in the presence of an officer seated at a large table. His conductor stopped as he entered the cabin, removed his hat, and reported, "Midshipman Boston, sir, according to orders."

"Very good, Mr. Van Cleave. You may return on deck and tell Mr. Biddle to call hands to get under way. Direct him to heave short and when he is up and down to let me know."

"Ay, ay, sir," said the boy, his eyes dancing

THE *WASP* GETS A NEW "REEFER"

with pleasurable excitement in anticipation of the cruise about to begin, as he saluted and darted out of the cabin, leaving the forlorn little Ned alone with his new commander, a very imposing, somewhat fierce-looking man with hooked nose, beetling brows, and great shock of reddish hair.

"So you are Master Boston, are you?" said the captain, clasping his hands and resting his elbows upon the table, while staring hard at the little fellow.

"Please, sir, yes, sir," answered Ned.

"Um! You don't look much like the little baby I saw last, some dozen years back," said the captain, retrospectively. "Well, sir, you were born to be a sailor, picked up on the ocean and christened on the sea, and I am glad to welcome you to my ship. I have a letter here from my old friend, your father, Commodore Little, in which he commends you to my care. I shall do the best I can for you; that is to say, I will see that you get fair play and a chance. I can do no more. A ship's a rough school. You will have to fight for yourself and do the best you can. Obey all orders you get promptly, and don't talk back. Do you mark that?" he queried, pointing his finger at the boy. "Don't talk back! If you have anything to say to an officer, it's generally the best plan not to say it! I'll keep an eye on you, and if you do anything worthy of notice I'll see that it is known. One thing more. I was one of your godfathers. I'm

IN THE WASP'S NEST

afraid we don't think much about God, or fathers either, on ships of war, Mr. Boston, but I am reminded that I am responsible to some extent, for your religious training. I'll admit I'm a pretty poor hand in the direction, too, but I recognize the fact and I will give you some more advice. Don't swear and don't drink! A man may be excused from a gentlemanly oath once in a while, in a great emergency, sir; and good liquor taken in moderation may help a prime seaman, but boys can let them both alone. As for me, sir, I confine myself to a morning and evening dram and never allow myself more than one damn per watch. See that you do neither. I'll look out for you as I do every man or boy committed to my care on this ship and I warn you not to come to me with any tales of trouble. That will do, sir. Good-morning."

These plain spoken words of homely advice were not unwelcome to the lad in spite of the rather startling admonitions and the curious philosophy of the captain. He felt instinctively that the ship was commanded by a fair man who would prove his friend if he deserved it. When he came to the deck again, the former quiet and order had given place to what appeared to him a scene of wild confusion.

The men at the foot of the masts were overhauling the gear, casting the ropes off the pins and coiling them upon the deck, clearing everything for running; the bars had been shipped in the capstan

THE *WASP* GETS A NEW "REEFER"

forward and manned by a great portion of the crew, who, to the shrill music of the fife, were walking in the cable. As Captain Jones came on deck, Mr. Rodgers, who was stationed in the forecastle, peering over the bows at the cable, which had been hove in until it ran perpendicularly from the hawse pipe to the anchor, cried out :

"We're hove short, sir."

"Avast heaving!" cried Biddle, promptly, and as the men stopped surging upon the capstan he turned to the captain, touched his hat, and reported :

"We are up and down, sir."

"Send the topmen aloft, loose the head sails, cast to starboard, and trip, sir," said the captain.

"Lay aloft, topmen!" cried Lieutenant Biddle. "Mr. Rodgers, loose the head sails, sir, lead along the jib halliards. Heave away on the bars there, the rest of you!" he continued, and as Jones nodded to him, "Heave and break away! Heave and pawl!" he shouted.

Meanwhile the shrouds were covered with figures who presently clustered about the topsail yards, lying snug amidships while the men on deck were heaving against the capstan. As the anchor grip was broken away Biddle lifted the trumpet to his lips and cried :

"Lay out, and loose!"

"Anchors aweigh, sir," reported Rodgers from the forecastle.

"Man the topsail sheets and halyards, jib hal-

IN THE WASP'S NEST

yards!" cried the lieutenant. "Let fall! Lay in! Sheet home! Hoist away! Overhaul the clewlines and down hauls there! Starboard your helm! Hands by the lee braces! Smartly, lads!"

"Very handsomely done, Mr. Biddle," remarked the captain, in a tone which from its unusual carrying power could easily be heard all over the ship, as the sails were sheeted home, the yards mast-headed, the jibs hoisted, and the ship under the fresh breeze swung to starboard and gathered way.

"Get the anchor catted and fished at once, sir, then get the courses and to'-gallant sails on her. Mr. Rodgers," he added, as that officer came aft to take the watch again. "I think you might give the citizens a gun to let them know we are under way. They seem to be taking a deal of interest in this ship. He pointed to the wharves black with masses of men, whose cheers came faintly down the wind as the ship, favored by the ebb tide and the river current, slipped rapidly down the river.

CHAPTER XII

FUN IN THE STEERAGE

DURING all this apparent confusion Ned Boston had stood aft on the quarter-deck, gazing with open mouth at the successive manœuvres by which the canvas was set on the broad yard-arms, the yards were mast-headed, the anchor hove up to the hawse-pipe, and the ship got under way. In spite of every care not to get in the way of anybody, he was bumped into and banged about by everybody. It did not seem possible that one small boy could manage to place himself in the road of so many people in so short a time, but the youngster did not realize that the treatment he was being subjected to was a part of the breaking-in of the newly joined, which was customary on ships of war of that period—and for long before and after for that matter—and which might be carried even to more unpleasant and damaging lengths. He had never been on a cruise before and his knowledge of ships was purely theoretical.

Nobody noticed him in any other way, however, until sail had been made and the ship had progressed some distance down the river. Then Midshipman Van Cleave, to whose care he had been

IN THE WASP'S NEST

committed, tapped him on the shoulder and bade him follow him below.

Descending the ladder to the berth-deck after his conductor, Ned found himself in a narrow, gloomy, ill-smelling little apartment called the steerage, extending across the ship just forward of the ward-room. There were transoms on either side forming rude couches, with rows of drawers or lockers beneath. Above the lockers were a few round openings called air-ports, or dead lights, now tightly closed, with solid balks of timber and tightly calked. In port these would have been open to admit light and air, but at sea they were kept rigidly closed. There was a table extending the length of the room amidships, a few wooden stools of the commonest make, a couple of tin wash-basins, and a locker with a limited supply of crockery and tin-ware completed the furniture of the apartment.

Three or four lads, all of them larger and older than Boston, were in the room when he came below. Two of them were sprawled out on the lockers, one sat on the table, another knelt before an open sea-chest, the contents of which he was overhauling in an entirely unceremonious way. Ned noticed with surprise and indignation that it was his own chest with which such liberties were being taken.

"Gentlemen," said Va Cleave, "I want to introduce to you Mr. Ned Boston, the newest member of the steerage mess. Mr. Boston, these

FUN IN THE STEERAGE

are your immediate superiors. You know, of course, that you are to obey all the orders of all your superiors, but especially of the midshipmen."

"As this is Mr. Boston's first introduction to the steerage," remarked Midshipman Claxton, the boy kneeling at the chest, "and as I have found in his chest, which I have ventured to open, gentlemen, in order to ascertain if there are any articles which the regulations do not allow United States ships-of-war to carry, this bottle, which presumably contains something to drink, therefore, I propose that we drink his health in his own liquor, and, as I have no doubt you are all agreed with me, I will set the example by taking the first drink."

Pulling the cork, which seemed rather difficult, without further remark, he lifted the bottle to his lips and took a long drink, Ned Boston glowering at him, too angry and astonished to speak. The young fellow put the bottle down instantly, gasping, choking, and yelling like a mad man as he did so.

"Wha—wha—what do you mean, sir?" he shouted, amid the jeers and laughter of his mates, "by deluding a gentleman in this manner? What is this infernal stuff anyway?"

"It is a pain-killer, sir," answered Boston, quietly; "my Aunt Little put it up for me."

"Pain-killer? Good heavens, I thought it was a midshipman-killer! Why didn't you tell me what it was before I drank it?"

IN THE WASP'S NEST

"You didn't ask me, sir, and the captain told me never to volunteer any information."

"Well, Mr. Boston, you have insulted me," continued the midshipman, wrathfully, "you've got to give me satisfaction. I suppose you have never used a firearm?"

"Yes, I have. I can hit a quarter with a rifle at a hundred paces five times out of ten without difficulty."

"Whew!" said the older boy, somewhat taken aback by this extraordinary proficiency. "I guess we'd better meet then with small swords, sir."

"Very well, sir. Old Commodore Little taught me how to handle a sword, and he always told me never to decline a meeting with a gentleman," answered the small boy bravely, though his nether lip trembled in spite of himself at the strangeness and terror of the situation. "Are you a gentleman, sir?" he asked, innocently.

"I see I'll have to teach you to know what I am with the rope's end," roared the angry midshipman, coming forward and pulling from his pocket a knotted rope, called a colt, which the older midshipmen were sometimes permitted to carry to emphasize their orders to a shirker among the crew.

He raised his hand, and before Boston divined what was about to happen he struck him a sharp blow across the shoulders. With a cry like a young tiger, the boy sprang at his larger antagonist. So sudden was his onset that he fairly knocked the

FUN IN THE STEERAGE

other down. Claxton's head struck the corner of an open drawer in the nearest locker, and he lay on the deck senseless. Ned rose to his feet and stood over him, with clenched fists and heaving bosom, but as he saw the other boy lying there so still and white a great fear filled him.

"Oh," he cried, "is he badly hurt? Have I killed him?"

"Don't worry, youngster," said Van Cleave, laying his hand on his shoulder, "it takes a harder shock than this to break Claxton's head. I know him. He'll be all right presently. Hand me that can of water, McLuney."

The prostrate figure was promptly soused with the cold water and in a few moments Claxton revived and sat up, looking vacantly about him, until his eye rested on his puny antagonist.

"Good heavens!" he cried, more in surprise than anger, "but you are a wild cat, youngster! I never dreamed it was in you. What will you be when you grow up?" As he spoke the boy rose to his feet. "Now youngster," he added, rather grimly, "I don't bear any malice on this account. But you've struck your superior officer. That's a crime at sea, and you've got to suffer for it. Eh, fellows?"

"That's right," answered the rest of the lads in chorus, "he ought to be well colted."

"Take it quietly. Grin and bear it, youngster," whispered Van Cleave aside to Boston. "If you

IN THE WASP'S NEST

do, you won't have any more trouble in the steerage. Everybody's got to take more or less of this stuff."

"Very well, sir," said Boston aloud. "If it be the custom I suppose I'll have to take it."

"You're a good plucky youngster, I see," exclaimed his big tormentor, this time approaching him cautiously, as if ready for another outburst. He laid the colt on Boston's shoulders in two or three sharp blows. The little fellow quivered with pain, but clenched his teeth and hands and said nothing. At the third blow Claxton threw down the colt.

"Dash it all!" he said, "I can't keep on hitting a baby like that."

"Am I taking it like a baby!" cried the little boy, more hurt by this apparent insult than by the blows.

"You're taking it like a man, youngster," said Claxton warmly, already ashamed of his action, "I've colted you and you knocked me down. We're square! Put your little flipper in there," he cried, generously extending his hand; "we're friends. You have paid your shot in this steerage. Nobody else'll lay a hand on you while I am by. Eh, gentlemen!"

"Thank you, sir," said Ned, and then put his head on his hands and burst into tears now that it was all over.

"Here, here, that will never do!" cried Van

FUN IN THE STEERAGE

Cleave, "what's the matter with you? Did it hurt so much?"

"I'm crying because you're all going to be kind to me," sobbed the little boy in the reaction caused by this sudden change of front.

"Well, don't worry about that," said Ten Eyck, another of the oldsters of the mess; "you'll not get another colting—that's fixed all right. But you've got to learn the ropes yet, and you'll come across a great many kinks one way or another before you get through. Now, then, that medicine of yours. Shipmates, don't you think that would be just the thing for poor Charlie Noble?"

"The very thing for him! Poor fellow, he's been looking so peaked and miserable that I'm afraid he'll never get well," answered Claxton, sympathetically.

"Show your Christian spirit, Boston, and give him a taste of it. If it doesn't clear him out, nothing ever will," added Ten Eyck.

"I tell you what to do, youngster," broke in Van Cleave, gravely, "you take this bottle of medicine to the officer of the watch. You will find him walking on the quarter-deck on the starboard side. That side there! He'll probably be carrying a trumpet. You can go up to him and ask him if he is Mr. Pirute and tell him that you give him that medicine, with the compliments of the Orlop deck, to clear out Charlie Noble."

The bewildered little boy, glad to be of service

IN THE WASP'S NEST

to any sick man and to be charged with so easy a duty, dried his eyes, picked up the bottle, scampered up the ladders, found the officer on deck and offered him the bottle with the remark :

"Mr. Pirute, here's some medicine to clear out poor Charlie Noble."

The midshipman on the other side of the deck burst into a sudden explosion of laughter, which he instantly stifled as well as he could. The man at the wheel grinned broadly, and even the captain, who happened to be aft on the weather side of the ship, heard the message and was forced to turn away to conceal his amusement. The officer of the watch turned purple with indignation.

"You young dog, you!" he gasped out at last, shaking his trumpet at the little midshipman, "my name's not Pirute. It's Knight, sir! And as for your medicine," he cried, snatching the bottle and throwing it overboard, "that for it!"

"But, sir, I thought——"

"Great heavens! Since when have midshipmen begun to think?"

"That Charlie Noble——"

"Charlie Noble is the galley smokestack, you idiot, and it often needs clearing out too. Who sent you up here to me with that fool message?"

"The—the—Orlop deck, sir."

"The Orlop deck isn't a person, it's a place. Who was it? Some of those crazy reefers, I'll be bound, wasn't it?"

FUN IN THE STEERAGE

It flashed into Ned's mind that he had been the victim of a practical joke, and it also occurred to him that if he betrayed the persons who had sent him on this fool's errand, it would go hard with all of them. So he shut his lips and said nothing.

"Who was it?" insisted the wrathful officer.

No answer.

"You won't tell, eh?"

"No, sir."

"Go up to the to'-gallant yard, sir!" snorted Mr. Knight at last, baffled by the persistence with which the boy refused to be tale-bearer, "and stay there until I call you down."

Ned had never been aloft on a man-of-war, but he was too proud to hesitate. He turned instantly, although he had only a vague idea where the top-gallant yard was, but, supposing that it must be somewhere on that dizzy mast, he sprang into the rigging, climbed painfully up the shrouds, struggled through the lubber's hole, in spite of a sharp injunction from the deck to go over the futtocks, which in his ignorance he did not comprehend, and finally reached the yard which he conceived to be his destination. He sat down upon it, clasped his hands around mast and halyards, shut his eyes and hung weakly there.

The ship was beginning to pitch and toss a little now, the breeze freshened, and they were approaching the bay. The boy, unused to such great heights, was very dizzy. He would have given worlds to

IN THE WASP'S NEST

be on deck again, but was too proud to cry out. Besides there was some solace in the thought that he was suffering for those who had placed him in this invidious position.

Mr. Knight's anger evaporated very quickly. At the captain's suggestion he presently called the chief boatswain's mate, and bade him send a man aloft, to bring the new midshipman down on deck.

"If ye please, sir," said the petty officer, a weather-beaten, bronzed old man of nearly sixty years, "I think I used to know that youngster. I'll go aloft an' git him myself."

"Very well, go ahead."

Far above the deck on the dizzy height of the main top-gallant yard, the poor little fellow clung desperately to his support. Presently he became aware of some one approaching from below. He kept his eyes shut wondering if it was to be more torment. Suddenly a huge hand was laid on his shoulder. A man swung himself across the yard and caught the boy by the arm.

"Master Ned," he said, eagerly, "look at me. Don't ye know me?"

"Why, it's old Jack Lang!" said Ned, opening his eyes and flinging himself into the arms of the man, so recklessly in fact, that they both nearly fell from the yard.

"Steady, now, steady!" said Jack, holding the boy tightly, "I recognized ye the minute ye stepped on deck, but this is the fust chance I got

FUN IN THE STEERAGE

to speak to ye. Praise be to God, we're shipmates onct more under the old flag !”

“Oh, Jack,” cried Ned, between laughing and sobbing, “I'm so glad to see you! Now I've got two friends on this ship, you and the captain.”

“Then ye've the most important men on the ship to look out fer yer,” said the old sailor, smiling. “I runs things for'ard an' he runs things aft, an' betwixt us two we'll take keer on ye. Now the leftenant sent me up to fetch ye down.”

“But I can get down myself, now that you are here, Jack,” said Ned, his courage returning to him at the sight of the old sailor, and the two friends easily and quickly gained the deck in safety.

CHAPTER XIII

NED BOSTON LEARNS THE ROPES

THERE was one trial among the many that made the life of a midshipman miserable that Ned Boston was spared. He was not seasick. He had knocked around in small boats, in all sorts of weather, with the old commodore, so that he had become immune to that dreadful malady. He had been put on watch the moment he struck the deck, and it was not until five bells, or half after six o'clock, that he was relieved to go down and get his supper. As the ship was but that day from port, instead of the usual ship's biscuit or hardtack, they had soft-tack (bread) and butter, tea with milk, sweetened with brown sugar, and the everlasting salt pork. That, with the addition of bean soup, varied with soaked hardtack, salt beef, coffee, and potatoes, with once in a while a heavy, soggy pudding filled with raisins, called "plum duff," constituted the usual bill of fare. It was plain enough food for one who had been brought up in comfort and plenty, but the midshipmen usually attacked their rations with a furious energy begot by salt-air appetites, stimulated by hard work.

When the first night came Boston had another

NED BOSTON LEARNS THE ROPES

surprise. His hammock boy, one of the seamen, who, for a small extra compensation, lashed and prepared his hammock, turned out to be his old friend, Billy Bowline, now graduated into a smart "A. B.," who had been attracted to the ship by old Jack Lang's representations, when he had been on recruiting services. The young sailor taught the boy not only how to swing and lash his hammock, but how to get in it, without immediately falling out of it, not an easy thing by any means, so that when he came below to turn in, after a whiff of fresh air on deck, the rest of the steerage were very much disappointed to see him do so well.

That night he had the mid watch out. It was awfully hard for a little boy, who had always gone to bed at sundown, and slept like a top until sun up the next day, to be routed out of a comfortable hammock—and Ned found his to be the most delightful bed he had ever slept on—and forced to go up on deck and keep awake for four solid hours. Indeed after the first excitement of standing watch had passed away, that first night, the youngster fairly fell asleep leaning his head upon his arms and resting the latter on the slide of one of the 32-pounder carronades of the battery. Mr. Rodgers had the watch with him, and instead of reporting him the kind-hearted but gruff lieutenant took off his own pea-jacket, laid it carefully over the little boy's shoulders and let him sleep. It was a kindness the meaning of which Ned realized after a

IN THE WASP'S NEST

while, and one he never forgot. The pitching of the ship as she progressed down the bay and got into rougher water caused him to slip from the gun and woke him up at last, and very much ashamed he was for having given way to this weakness.

He was a glad little fellow indeed when eight bells struck forward and he heard the boatswain's mate hoarsely calling,

"All the starboard watch! Relieve the wheel and chain! Tumble up here, all you star-bow-lines!"

When he was relieved he ran down to the steerage and tore off his clothes, eager to enjoy the three hours of sleep, yet remaining to him. As he attempted to swing himself into his hammock, however, his arm struck something large and hard, and the pull of his elbow capsized a division tub half full of water, which his kindly associates had secured in the hammock as a little surprise for him! The cold water flooded him from head to foot, and as his hammock also was drenched he spent the rest of the night wrapped up in his own pea-jacket and those his messmates of the uproarious steerage gave him when they saw his plight, stretched out on a hard, narrow locker, being rolled to the deck several times by the rough motion of the ship.

When morning broke, after the hardest and most uncomfortable night he had ever spent, after washing his face in salt water, which he found very uncomfortable, he made his way to the deck to find

NED BOSTON LEARNS THE ROPES

that the *Wasp* was well at sea, stretching away to the southeastward, with bright lookouts at every masthead, in the hope of falling in with cruisers or merchant ships of the enemy.

For the next few days he applied himself assiduously and literally to learning the ropes. There seemed to him to be countless numbers at the pin rails below the shrouds, on either side of each mast, and at the fife rails around the masts. He despaired of ever mastering their uses or indeed even their names, until, at Lieutenant Biddle's suggestion, he wrote the name of each one, in his sprawling school-boy hand, on the rail where it was belayed, and every spare minute he lingered over this novel textbook, conning it again and again, until, being a bright lad, he finally mastered it, and could put his hand on any rope, brace, sheet, halyard, or line on the ship, and tell its use as well.

What with this effort and constant drills at quarters, and target practice, and the learning of the rough and ready but necessary knot-and-splice seamanship from Jack Lang and Billy Bowline, and standing his watch regularly, he hardly had time to call his soul his own. It was a good thing for him, too, for he would have been dreadfully homesick if every moment had not been filled with new and strange duties.

The oldsters in the steerage still amused themselves more or less at his expense, but he strove to bear their fun good-naturedly, and was so cheerful

IN THE WASP'S NEST

and jolly when he was the victim of their rough practical jokes that he soon became a general favorite. In spite of the fact that it was always properly and securely lashed, sometimes his hammock would come down with a run and send him sprawling out on the deck.

Once, when he jumped to the call of his watch, he found that his trouser legs were tied into hard knots. He had been told that there was no crime greater than being late in relieving a watch, so that, in desperation, he went on deck, clad only in his nether garments, carrying his knotted trousers in his hand, reporting to Mr. Knight in that guise. He got well rated for it too, and nearly froze, while he stood for half an hour getting the knots out, but he took all these things so good-naturedly, when there was nothing back of them except harmless if somewhat rude and coarse horse play, and he showed himself to be of such a sunny temper, a singular combination of innocence and ability, and he took up seamanship so quickly, that he became the pet of the steerage and indeed of his ship's company.

His station at general quarters was with the two long guns on the forecastle, under the immediate command of Mr. Rodgers, with Jack Lang as the chief petty officer. The crew were exercised every day at target practice, and under the careful teaching and training they received they developed an astonishing ability to hit things, with their clumsy

NED BOSTON LEARNS THE ROPES

old-fashioned cannon, with their very inadequate sights and elevating machinery. Many of the men, like Jack Lang, were veterans of three wars, and some of them, including the chief boatswain's mate, had been pressed on English ships. Lang himself was virulently bitter against the English navy, and it was more than suspected that he had felt the lashes of the cat. Although he never mentioned or referred to having received such punishment, yet the way his face darkened when the subject was brought up or touched upon, the fierce, grim look of anger that supplemented his generally peaceful expression, were suggestive of his feelings.

The first cruise of the *Wasp* was uneventful. They picked up a few small prizes of little value, mostly schooners or small traders, they chased a privateer, were chased themselves by a stray English frigate, but fell in with no valuable prize or cruiser or man-o'-war of a size suitable to engage.

They met the usual summer weather, too, varied now and then by a sudden squall or a half gale of wind, which blew for a day, kicked up a nasty sea, and gave the youngsters something to think about. They all got their sea legs, however, and the days were improved by constant drilling and training. Mr. Rapp, a passed midshipman, looked after Boston's studies, by the captain's orders, and, as his familiarity with the ship gave him a little time to spare, the young reefer was forced to apply himself to arithmetic and the first principles of the mysteri-

IN THE WASP'S NEST

ous and beautiful art of navigation. His pride when he first "took the sun" with Mr. Knight's sextant was great.

It was late in September when the *Wasp* returned to the Delaware to replenish her water and supplies, whence she sailed again on the thirteenth of October, with instructions to endeavor to intercept the West India ships, en route for England. Jones had the *Wasp* and her crew now in the very acme of preparation and perfection. They all earnestly longed to meet something near their size flying the British flag, upon which they could prove their mettle. The famous victory of the *Constitution* over the *Guerrière* had made them all anxious to show what they could do with the *Wasp*, if they met an enemy. Their desires were soon to be gratified.

CHAPTER XIV

THE *WASP* LOSES TWO OF HER MEN

THEY speedily made the run down the bay from Philadelphia, passed the Capes, and bore away to the southeastward. After they had been out for a few days they ran into a fierce gale, which blew up early in the afternoon, increasing in violence as the day wore on, until at nightfall they were fairly in the heart of a mad tempest. The canvas had been shortened by the orders of the watchful captain at the first indications of the serious nature of the storm, and, before its fury broke upon them, everything had been made snug alow and aloft, the light yards sent down, rolling tackles got up, preventers rigged, boat gripes looked to, life-lines passed, and so on.

Now, as midshipman on the forecastle, it was Ned's duty, in shortening sail, to supervise the work of the men on the head-booms. The flying jib, of course, had come in with the royals and top-gallant sails early in the afternoon, and when the mizzen topsail had been furled, and close reefs taken in the fore and main topsails, and the courses had been taken in, the jib had been hauled down and snugged close to the boom, and the furling-line, or sea-gasket,

IN THE WASP'S NEST

passed to secure the sail ; after which it was replaced by the fore staysail, and under this reduced canvas the little ship staggered along close to the wind. She proved herself a magnificent sea-boat, riding the waves like a duck, and, although the spray came aboard in bucketfuls, the ship took in little water. No one, of course, was allowed to go below, and both watches remained on deck, the captain himself taking charge, with the wind increasing in violence every moment.

About ten o'clock at night, from some unexplained reason, the lashings of the jib worked loose, and the fierce wind ripped a corner of the sail out in a great baggy mass from the centipede. The storm was at its height at the moment, and the *Wasp* was rolling and pitching terribly in the tremendous seas—"fit to jerk the masts an' booms out of her," as Lang said.

The officer on the fore-castle promptly reported the catastrophe to the captain, who, from the fact that the ship instantly began to fall off and bring the wind abeam, had already apprehended that something was wrong. The helm was put hard down to force her nose up to the wind once more, but without avail in the face of the pull on the opening jib. Meanwhile, as the wind caught more and more of the sail, the boom bent sharply under the strain and began to buckle from the awful pressure upon it ; and the pull aloft by the jib and fore top-gallant stays rendered it possible that the top-gallant mast

THE *WASP* LOSES TWO OF HER MEN

might also go unless the strain were relieved at once. Something had to be done, and done quickly.

Whether it was due to carelessness on the part of some of the forecastle men or not, no one could say, but two of the seamen, who had been charged with the duty of furling the jib, evidently felt that the situation was, in a certain sense, a reflection upon them, so without orders they ran out on the bowsprit, dropped to the foot rope of the jib-boom, drew their sheath-knives, and tried to cut loose the huge mass of canvas. To refurl it in that storm was an impossibility.

With a noble idea of his own duty Ned would have followed them to the shaking spar had not old Jack Lang caught him by the shoulders and forcibly restrained him. The midshipman was only a baby in the arms of the old sailor, who lifted him up unceremoniously and held him tight in spite of his orders and his cries, while he fought and kicked and screamed with all his might.

"Ye can't go out there, Master Ned, an' nobody'd ought to done it. That boom'll carry away in a minute. See how she buckles an' bends, an' them men'll go to Davy Jones's locker sure."

The officer of the forecastle, Mr. Rodgers, had been as quick to see the danger as the sailor. Hollowing his hand he shouted, in a voice of stentorian power, to the two men painfully working away on the foot ropes, to come in. The spray was dashing over them furiously. Either the sail would

IN THE WASP'S NEST

be blown out of the gasket and ripped from its bolt ropes, or the stays and halyards would part, or the boom carry away in a moment. There was no rope or canvas which could stand such tremendous pressure.

Yet the situation of the ship was critical indeed. In spite of the fact that they had attempted to brace in the foretopsail and had the helm jammed hard down, with four seamen sweating on the wheel, she was slowly falling off toward the trough of the sea. If that terrific gale took her abeam and two or three waves came aboard it would be the end of her. She would go over on her beam ends, and God help them all then. All this had happened in a few seconds when the expected catastrophe occurred.

With a crash that was heard above the screaming of the tempest, the jib-boom parted at the iron as clean as if it had been chopped off. The halyards, stays, guys, and martingales gave way at once, and the whole mass, carrying with it the two brave fellows on the boom, was whirled to leeward in a flash. Ned caught a glimpse of terror-stricken white faces driving past the ship in the darkness. He thought he heard a faint scream, and it was all over. The blackness closed around them, and no human eye ever looked on them again.

The pressure forward relieved by this accident, the ship came to the wind once more and plunged steadily on. There was nothing on earth or sea that any one could do for the men who had been carried

THE *WASP* LOSES TWO OF HER MEN

away. Indeed, entangled in the wreckage, they must have been battered to pieces before they struck the water. At any rate they were gone, and gone forever.

The boy stood aghast within the shelter of the old man's arms. His little heart almost stopped beating. These were the first lives he had seen lost at sea, the first of many that he was to see given up in battle or in tempest. And what made it harder to bear was the consciousness that would come to him that in some way he was to blame for the accident.

CHAPTER XV

BOSTON IS SEVERELY REPRIMANDED

THE hurricane blew with furious violence throughout the night. The *Wasp*, however, proved herself a very weatherly ship, and, in spite of the carrying away of the head-booms beyond the bowsprit, she buoyantly rode out the storm. Morning broke dull and gray with a tremendous wind still, although it was sensibly abating. The sea, however, ran higher than ever, as is often the case. There was not a sail to be seen, nor, of course, any signs of the lost spars or masts.

The violence of the storm rendered it impossible, and indeed it was not necessary, for the *Wasp's* men to rig a jury jib-boom or take any steps looking to the repair of the damage other than to reeve a preventer foretop-gallant stay to take the place of the one that had been carried away.

In order to be prepared for making further sail should it be desirable, and possibly because the storm had passed its maximum, Captain Jones sent up his light yards again as soon as it was morning.

After everything had been made secure he sent orders to Ned Boston to report to him. When the miserable little midshipman entered the captain's

BOSTON IS SEVERELY REPRIMANDED

cabin he found Captain Jones seated at his table, with Mr. Biddle on one side and Mr. Rodgers on the other.

"Mr. Boston," said the captain, severely, "I wish to know what was the cause of the deplorable accident last night whereby we lost two brave seamen and carried away a jib-boom and a flying jib-boom, sir, to say nothing of the jib itself."

"Yes, sir," began the boy, nervously shifting from one foot to the other in his agitation. "The furling line must have been badly secured, sir, or the sail wasn't closely snugged down to the boom as it should have been before we passed the sea-gasket, for the wind got under the clew and lifted it, bagged it out, and—and that's all I know, sir."

"Umph!" said Captain Jones, with great sternness, "you are the midshipman on the head-booms, are you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you are, of course, responsible for everything done there?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who is stationed on the jib-boom at furling sail?"

"Thompson and Sykes were, sir."

"They are the men who went overboard, are they not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Mr. Boston," said the captain, with an appalling severity, "this is a most serious matter. A furl-

IN THE WASP'S NEST

ing-line or sea-gasket properly secured should not work loose, sir. The carelessness which produced the accident last night might have had consequences even more deplorable than those which have resulted. Under the pressure of that sail, as the wind caught it, the ship fell off against the helm. With little canvas spread aft, there was nothing to bring her to. We were in imminent danger, sir, of getting into the trough of the sea with that tempest right on our beam. We might have gone over if the carrying away of the boom had not relieved the pressure. If we had got on our beam ends it would have been necessary to cut away the masts in order to right the ship, if even that would have done it. A most dangerous operation indeed, sir, and one that would probably have been attended by the loss of many men and perhaps the ship."

Poor little Ned turned as white as death as this tremendous indictment was recited against him. Seeing which the captain continued more kindly :

"You are a very young officer, sir, and I am glad that this happening did not come to you later in life. Let it be an everlasting lesson to you. Remember to see personally that everything is thoroughly done of which you have charge. You are charged with just such responsibilities and are appointed in the naval service for just such purposes. Above all, sir, be particular that anything that is lashed is made so secure that it cannot possibly work loose in a sea way, or in a storm. I believe that you did the best you

BOSTON IS SEVERELY REPRIMANDED

could, and as yet you have had but little experience, so I shall not report you in this instance, and as the men whose fault it was primarily have paid with their lives in endeavoring to rectify it, there is nothing more to be said, except this, sir. Whenever anything of that sort has to be done in a moment of danger you must personally endeavor to rectify it, and not allow the men to go alone. An American officer, sir, must always lead !”

The boy's heart almost stopped its beating ; he felt as if he were fainting. He could not speak or make a sound ; his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth. He had, as a matter of fact, inspected the lashing before he came on deck, when the sail was furled, and to his unskilled eye it seemed secure. As the captain doubtless realized, it was an error of ignorance and inexperience rather than of carelessness, yet he did well to emphasize the lesson. There was one thing, however, which he apparently did not know, and that was that Boston had endeavored to go out on the boom with the men, and had only been prevented by the superior strength and determination of the chief boatswain's mate. He would have urged this in his own defence, but he was so filled with emotion that he was incapable of speech, he could not say a word to save his life.

“Do not take it so hard, Mr. Boston,” continued the captain, greatly moderating his tone as he noticed the boy's anguish. “I dare say you did the best you could. I'm only pointing out to you that

IN THE WASP'S NEST

the government does not want you to do your best or your worst. It wants you to do the thing with which you are charged to do, and do it right, and it wants you to lead your men, not send them. That is the worst feature of the affair, that you were not there with them. You would have lost your life, sir, but you would have done your duty."

"If you will permit me, sir," interrupted Mr. Rodgers, "I think that Mr. Boston did make an effort to go out on the boom with the men. I have an indistinct recollection that some one prevented him."

"Is that so, sir?" said the captain, turning to the small culprit.

The poor little midshipman could only nod his head.

"Who was it?"

No answer.

"Do you know who it was, Mr. Rodgers?"

"I think it may have been the chief bo's'n's mate, sir."

"Ah! Orderly, present my compliments to the officer of the deck and request him to send Lang to me at once."

After a few moments' wait, the old sailor came rolling into the cabin, knuckled his forehead, and folded his arms.

"Bo's'n's mate," asked Captain Jones, "what do you know about the accident last night on the head booms?"

BOSTON IS SEVERELY REPRIMANDED

“Well, sir, the furlin’-line wa’n’t passed proper. The wind got under the clew of it, an’ the lashin’ give way, the sail bellied out, an’ then the boom begun to buckle like a willer branch, w’ich it wa’n’t a sound stick, yer honor, fer I examined the place this mornin’, sir, an’ part of it was rotten, though you couldn’t see it from the outside. Thompson an’ Sykes, them as was charged with the dooty of furlin’ sail, an’ w’ich it was their own carelessness, sir, that done it, run out on the foot ropes. They had their sheath knives out tryin’ to cut away the canvas w’en the boom broke short off at the iron an’ they went with it.”

“Yes, I know that,” continued the captain; “but where was Mr. Boston then?”

“He done his best, sir, to git out there with them two men. Indeed, he’d ’a’ led ’em hissself, but he was prewented.”

“Who prevented him?”

“I did, sir.”

“How did you do it?”

“Well, sir, I’m sorry to be disrespectful to an officer, sir, even a young un, but I jest took him up in my arms, like he was a babby. Ye see, sir, as you knows werry well, sir, I’d done it afore many a time, w’en he was a little fellow, an’ it seemed like old times fer me to hold him tight an’ him a kickin’ an’ screamin’ an’ ragin’ like mad to git out there, an’ I knowed he could do nuthin’ out there with them men. Why, Lord love ye—beggin’ yer

IN THE WASP'S NEST

honor's pardon—the boy ain't big enough to reach from the foot rope to the boom, an' I jest hung onto him till the boom carried away, an' then there wa'n't no necessity."

"And it was a shame, bo's'n's mate," broke out Ned, furiously, finding his voice at last. "I'm disgraced by it. I wish I had gone out there and died with the men. It was my fault. I thought it was passed all right. It looked all right to me, but it wasn't—and—it was my fault."

"Will you allow me, captain," said Biddle, the first lieutenant.

"Speak, sir," answered the captain.

"Mr. Boston, don't take it so hard, though your emotion does you full credit, I am sure," continued the first lieutenant. "We want this to be a lesson to you. We are all interested in your career. We don't want you to take this too much to heart, and yet we don't want you to think of it lightly. Everything that goes wrong is the fault of the officer in charge, and the responsibility is shared through all the ranks of the service. Primarily the carelessness of those men, for which they paid with their lives, was their fault, but it was also your fault and in some measure Mr. Rodgers's fault, for he had charge of the forecastle, and in some degree my fault, for I am the executive officer of the ship."

"Ay," broke in Captain Jones, "and in some degree my fault, for I am captain. Therefore we are all responsible with you. There, there, my lad,

BOSTON IS SEVERELY REPRIMANDED

wipe away those tears, though they do you honor, and I am glad to learn from the chief bo's'n's mate that you made so gallant an effort to set things right. That was your duty and I'm glad to learn I was mistaken about charging you with failing there. Lang, you did perfectly right to prevent Mr. Boston from going out on that yard. There was nothing that he could have done under such circumstances, and although it is a grave breach of discipline to interfere with an officer," said the captain, half smiling as he looked from the huge weather-beaten old sailor to the very small midshipman, who bit his lips, trying to check his tears, "I shall pass it over this time, and—er—in short, my steward will give you a glass of grog."

"Thankee, sir, thankee. I drinks yer health an' I hopes Mr. Boston'll forgive the ol' man what knowed him w'en he was a babby."

"He will, I'm sure. That will do. You may go now. Mr. Boston, you will doubtless have an abundance of opportunities to reinstate yourself in my good graces on the cruise, and I shall be most happy when you shall avail yourself of them."

Poor Boston was a most miserable little boy when he went below in the steerage, and refused to be comforted. He was growing more manly and did not actually break down and cry there, though he felt very much like it. The oldsters among the midshipmen were inclined to agree with the captain. The youngsters, however, thought that his

IN THE WASP'S NEST

censure had been unduly severe, but Boston sturdily defended his commanding officer, and maintained that he had been treated with generous lenity and kindness, rather than with severity, and he determined, if Providence gave him opportunity, to show the captain that he appreciated his forbearance, by some desperate act of heroism, which would re-establish his reputation. Meantime, he determined to have nothing further to do with old Jack Lang, a resolution which grieved and worried that adoring old sailor greatly.

CHAPTER XVI

NED FIGHTS HIS FIRST GREAT BATTLE

IT was a dreary, miserable day they spent on the *Wasp*. The wind still swept furiously across the tumbling waters under the sodden sky, and the ship, under shortened canvas, plunged and pitched and rolled along. Toward evening, however, the clouds broke, and, though the hard gale still blew, the moon shone fitfully through the rifts in the drifting clouds.

About eleven o'clock at night Boston, who was snugly wrapped up in a warm jacket and on watch on the forecastle, thought he discovered a light to leeward. Fearful lest he might be deceived, he sprang into the fore shrouds and ran up to the top. By this time he had learned to disdain the lubber's hole, and he could swing himself over the futtock shrouds like a monkey. Gaining the top, he scampered up the topsail yard and stepped boldly out upon it; the topsail still being double-reefed, he held tight to the tye and peered earnestly out in the darkness of the night in the direction where he thought he had detected the light.

There it was, sure enough ! It rose and fell with

IN THE WASP'S NEST

the pitching of the ship in the huge waves. Now he saw it, now it disappeared, but it always came again. The moon had set, and the night was too black, and the light too far away for him to distinguish anything. Yet the light was there. It gleamed like a red star, and a light meant a ship. There was no mistaking it. His heart beat furiously as he stared at the little luminous point in all that waste of blackness. In his agitation he came down from aloft by sliding down the top-mast backstay, calling out when he reached the starboard gangway, "Light ho ! Light ho !"

The news was instantly reported to Captain Jones, who had not yet retired for the night, but who was below in his cabin at the time, and in a moment that officer, wrapped in a heavy boat cloak, came up on the forecastle, followed by Lieutenant Knight, who had the watch. The captain had not spoken to Boston, or noticed him in any way, since the reproof of the morning before, and at first he did not deign to address him even now.

"Mr. Knight," he asked, knitting his brows and leaning over the starboard cathead as if striving to pierce the blackness with the intensity of his gaze, "where away is the light, sir?"

"I've not seen it myself, sir," answered the lieutenant. "Mr. Boston reported it."

"Whereabouts did you see it, sir?" said the captain, turning to the midshipman.

"There, sir," exclaimed the small boy, saluting and

NED FIGHTS HIS FIRST BATTLE

pointing away to the starboard. "You can see it at intervals, sir. Now, sir! There it is again!"

"Ay, 'tis so; I see it now," exclaimed the captain at last, after following with his eyes in a concentrated stare the direction of the boy's outstretched hand.

"And I," cried Lieutenant Knight at the same moment.

"I could see it much plainer from the topsail yard, sir," volunteered Ned.

"Have you been aloft, Mr. Boston?"

"Yes, sir. I saw it first from the deck here, and then I went aloft to make sure before I reported it."

"You have done very well, sir," said the captain. The boy's heart bounded at this word of praise.

"Ha! There is another!" suddenly interrupted Knight. "Two!"

"Mr. Boston," said the captain, "run up to the topsail yard again and see if you can make out any more."

Instantly the boy sprang into the rigging with the agility of a cat and ran as he had never done before to his point of vantage on the topsail yard. The motion of the ship was violent enough below, at this high elevation it seemed tremendous; however, he held on tight and took another long look. In a moment his shrill voice sent a message to the expectant officers on the forecastle far below, in spite of the noise of the wind and sea.

IN THE WASP'S NEST

"There's more of them, sir ! I can see four, five, six at least ! It's hard to tell how many, they rise and fall so in the heaving sea. They're strung out in a long line and seem to be heading right across our path."

"All right. Lay down from aloft, Mr. Boston," said the captain. "Mr. Knight, send your watch to the braces and bring the ship by the wind. We'll keep to windward of those sail until morning."

"Shall I call the other watch, sir ?"

"No, I hardly think that is necessary. We'll simply keep them in sight until day breaks. They may be, and probably are, a convoy of merchantmen homeward bound from Jamaica, but 'tis possible that they might be a squadron of the enemy's heavy ships. In any event we'll find out in the morning."

Presently, after the helm had been shifted and the yards braced up, the little *Wasp* was brought to the wind on the port tack, and staggered along throughout the night in a course parallel to that taken by the enemy. The day broke brilliantly clear, but with the fag end of the gale still blowing hard and the waves rolling tremendously. In fact, if anything, the sea was rougher than it had been at the height of the storm. It often happens that the waves follow, rather than accompany, a storm of that kind.

The *Wasp* was rolling fearfully. Both watches, during the night, had known of the lights that had

NED FIGHTS HIS FIRST BATTLE

been sighted, consequently as soon as day dawned the decks were covered with officers and men. A few miles to leeward they made out a dozen ships, pitching and lumbering along in the heavy sea. It was quite evident to the practiced seamen of the *Wasp* that they were in the presence of a convoy of merchant ships, under the protection of a man-of-war brig, a little larger and heavier than their own ship. The convoy was very much scattered. It had probably consisted of a greater number of vessels, which had become separated in the storm that had dealt so hardly with the *Wasp*, and which had not been able to reassemble.

Several of the merchant ships were armed, it was developed, as the *Wasp* drew nearer to them, and if they joined with the war brig in attacking the American sloop-of-war she would be heavily overmatched, yet Jones did not hesitate a moment. He headed at once for the war brig, which signalled the convoy to square away before the wind, and escape while she turned and beat up toward the approaching vessel, interposing between her convoy and its pursuer. As she did this she hoisted a Spanish flag. It was a ruse that deceived no one. The Spanish ship did not float which would lead down upon an enemy in so gallant a fashion. Besides there were unmistakable evidences that the ship that was approaching was English.

It was with a feeling of high glee, therefore, that Captain Jones and his men made ready for the con-

IN THE WASP'S NEST

test. The fact that she was larger than the *Wasp* was a thing he congratulated himself upon, as the disparity in size and force was not great—in fact the ships were as nearly equal as is ever likely to be the case in battles on the sea. The wind was still too severe for the light sails to be used, and Jones calmly proceeded to strip the *Wasp* for the fight, by sending down the royal and top-gallant yards and striking the top-gallant masts.

As the two war vessels neared each other the men of the *Wasp* noticed that the English brig was without her main-yard, which was lashed on the deck forward of the mainmast. She had set her foretopsail close reefed, and carried a boom mainsail aft, which really converted her into a brigantine, a very handy rig, and one which enabled her to display all the canvas the rough weather would permit her to carry at the time. The loss of the main-yard would have been a serious one in milder weather, but under the circumstances it counted for nothing, if indeed it did not increase the brig's handiness, by changing her rig to one perfectly adapted to the heavy weather then prevailing.

Owing to the small spread of canvas they could show, the two ships approached each other very deliberately and both had abundant time to make every preparation for battle.

Ned Boston had often been called to quarters since he had been on the sloop-of-war, but never had it been for anything more serious than playing at

NED FIGHTS HIS FIRST BATTLE

war. This time the beating call summoned him in deadly earnest. It seemed to his untutored ear that there was an unusually ominous note in the rattling of the drum, in answer to which the men sprang to their stations, and he wondered why it was that everybody seemed to feel so cheerful and laughed and joked so at the prospect of the imminent battle. His own heart was thumping rarely at the time. He did not feel like a hero at all. On the contrary, he felt very serious and sober indeed as he ran hastily up on the forecastle, where his battle station was, and superintended the loading of the starboard gun mounted there.

He was afraid that he was a trifle frightened, but he determined to die rather than betray any evidence of fear. Still his mind would go back to the quiet, peaceful Massachusetts home, the old house among the trees, his Aunt Little in her white cap, the cows, and the chickens; his dog, the pony he rode—all these things seemed so attractive to him. He wondered why he had ever left them. Then he thought of that brave old fighter, Commodore Little. He would be worthy of his training, the boy determined as he pressed his lips together and busied himself in his duties. He would be brave. He had a name to make, a training to honor. No one should call him a coward. But it was fortunate that he had so much to do that he had not time to dwell on these things. He did wonder if he would be killed, and while he worked away over his guns he prayed harder than

IN THE WASP'S NEST

he had ever done in his life for God to take care of him. Then he felt better.

Captain Jones held the weather-gage, which, of course, he intended to keep, and the crew were sent to the starboard battery, with instructions to double-shot the guns and then keep them fast for a close-range broadside. The result of the first frigate action was well known to the men of the ship, and when Captain Jones remarked to them, as he passed along the decks for a final inspection, that his lads would do for yonder ship what the *Constitution* had done for the *Guerrière*, his remarks were met by enthusiasm and delighted cheers.

Boston felt himself a veritable hero at this moment. The cheering of the men encouraged him; he fancied he had mastered his fears, and his little heart swelled with pride at the thought that he was about to take part in a real battle, especially as the captain stopped a minute on the forecastle and spoke a kind and approving word to him.

The two ships approached each other slowly until they came within fifty yards of each other, whereupon Captain Jones sprang upon the slide of a caronade and hailed the stranger. Instantly the brig hauled down the Spanish flag. As she did so the stops were broken from several little balls of bunting at the mastheads and gaff ends, and the splendid red flag of England ripped out in the fierce wind of the gray morning. The stars and stripes had been flying on the *Wasp* since daybreak. The two ships

NED FIGHTS HIS FIRST BATTLE

were edging nearer now, and they were, in fact, right abeam of each other.

Ned Boston stood at the long twelve and stared at the brig rolling until she almost uncovered her bilge. He could see the men at the guns, the officers on the poop. There was a big gun on the brig's forecastle which seemed to be pointed straight at him. Its tompion was out, and it looked fearfully huge and menacing. The boy began to have that sick, faint feeling again. He trembled slightly as he bit his lip to control himself. He would have found relief in screaming if he could have done it. But discipline and honor, two big words for any boy, constrained him. He drew his sword, and the feel of the weapon reassured him a little, and he ordered his own long twelve trained carefully on the enemy.

Suddenly there was a blaze of light from the ship before him, then a cloud of smoke, then a dull, heavy, menacing roar, and then the scream of shot; followed by the parting of rope, the tearing of canvas, a crash of splintered wood, a shriek, a cry; a man had fallen on the forecastle, and lay groaning, red blood staining the white deck.

Boston was unharmed, and was not afraid now. That sight of the wounded seaman made him angry. He burned to fire on the English ship, which was swinging nearer. The smoke blew quickly away before the gale, and he could see the crew of the brig frantically reloading their cannon. Now they

IN THE WASP'S NEST

were pointing muskets at the *Wasp*. Would Captain Jones never begin?

The English ship opened the conflict by a broadside, accompanied by a rattling fire of musketry. For a few moments Jones held on, until he got in exactly the right position, when he gave the order to fire, and the broadside of the *Wasp* was hurled back on the enemy. It was 11.32 when he gave the order. The ships were rolling tremendously, burying the gun muzzles at every roll, and the spray was coming aboard in bucketfuls, but the gun crews stood to their quarters and blazed away.

Boston had soon lost the paleness which had overspread his face when the English shot had come screaming above his head, and the mechanical operations of preparing and loading the long twelve-pounder on the forecastle so distracted his mind that he became actually indifferent to the noise of the battle. Even when another man in the top was struck and fell to the deck, in his wild excitement he was scarcely conscious of the sight which would have filled him with horror a few moments before. Captain Jones remarked that the English broadside was delivered on the upward roll of the ship, and the balls mainly cleared his hull, although they played havoc among the *Wasp's* top-hamper. Captain Jones was particular to direct his gunners to aim at the hull of the enemy and to fire always on the downward roll, rather than on the upward toss.

The different tactics of the two contesting com-

NED FIGHTS HIS FIRST BATTLE

manders in this particular continued to the end. The English invariably fired on the upward roll while the Americans did the reverse. The effect of the English fire at the top-hamper of the American ship was soon painfully apparent.

CHAPTER XVII

THE *WASP* TAKES THE *FROLIC*

FOR perhaps five minutes the furious exchange of broadsides continued. The Americans noticed that the English fired two shots to their one, their own fire by Captain Jones's direction being very deliberate, great care being taken on the part of the officers and men to see that the guns were carefully aimed, and that every shot hit, with what effect, of course, could not yet be ascertained. Meanwhile the veterans on the *Wasp* remarked that they had never experienced so rapid and so fierce a fire. The air was filled with hurtling, screaming shot. Ropes were cut above their heads, stays parted, braces shot away, canvas torn to ribbons, and the masts wounded. The casualties were happily very few, and the hull of the *Wasp* received very little punishment, but the damage aloft was surprising.

Presently there was a tremendous crash overhead and the main topmast of the *Wasp*, pierced by a shot just above the cap, was so weakened thereby as to be unable to carry the sail in the furious wind blowing, and the whole thing toppled over to starboard. The wreck fell across the fore-and-foretop-sail braces, rendering it impossible for the Ameri-

THE *WASP* TAKES THE *FROLIC*

cans to swing their head-yards. Ordering the sail trimmers aloft to clear away the wreck, Captain Jones held grimly on, still pouring in his fire upon the brig. As his gunners got the range securely, their own fire increased in rapidity until broadside matched broadside. The men on both ships were mad with excitement. They were so close to each other that their range was pointblank. Again and again Ned Boston fired his heavy twelve-pounder into the English ship. Mingled with the roar of the carronades and the scream of the long guns, was the continuous crackle of the small arms.

Fortunately the wind blew the smoke away, so that each ship was plainly visible to the other the whole time of the action. Indeed a long trail of black smoke blew away to leeward after the struggling ships, as they wallowed along in the great seas, spitting fire and destruction at one another. Three minutes after the loss of the *Wasp's* main topmast her spanker gaff was shot away and the torn sail was whipped into ribbons in the wind; next, before it could be secured, the upper part of the mizzen topmast came crashing down into the top.

Meanwhile the fire of the enemy seemed to be keeping up with unabated vigor. No material damage of any sort appeared to have been done to her. Every spar was still standing and she looked as fit as when she first came sweeping gallantly into the action. Captain Jones and his officers

IN THE WASP'S NEST

could not understand it. The fire of the *Wasp* apparently had been delivered carefully, and it was a mystery to them why her shot had not done more damage. So far as they could judge in the confusion of the action, they believed that many of their shot had struck the enemy, yet there was the brig apparently unharmed. Captain Jones began to feel anxious.

The ships had been gradually closing with each other, as the action continued, and after twenty minutes of close fighting they were within sixty feet of one another. At this juncture a lucky shot from Boston's long gun carried away the head braces of the brig. Unable to swing her head-yards, her after sail forced her up into the wind. At the same time the loss of the spanker on the *Wasp*, the head sails on the foremast being held rigid by the pressure of the main topmast upon the braces, threw the head of the *Wasp* to starboard.

The two ships came together with a terrific crash. The bowsprit of the brig was thrust across the deck of the *Wasp*, between the main and mizzen masts, fouling the wreck of the mizzen top-gallant mast. Foreseeing the opportunity as the ships were swinging, Jones, after a broadside of solid shot, which beat the English bows in, had directed his crew to load with grape and canister. As the two ships came together the entire broadside of the *Wasp* was discharged at contact range into the helpless enemy. She was raked from stem to stern with a

THE *WASP* TAKES THE *FROLIC*

perfect hail of bullets. It was as if a mighty comb of death had been dragged over the ship. The English could make no reply. So close were the two vessels that the American rammers had struck the bows of the British ship, as the men loaded the guns before they poured in their awful discharge.

Boston, on the forecastle, from his elevated position, had depressed his gun, and the shot from the long twelve had ripped through the deck of the hapless English ship. At the same time Lieutenant Biddle and his boarders mustered in the waist, ready to spring upon the enemy. They came running to the point of attack without being called away and without orders—in fact, in despite of them. Not yet knowing the condition of the enemy, Captain Jones would fain have poured in another raking broadside or two before he boarded. But the excited men would not be denied.

Old Jack Lang, bleeding in the face from a slight wound caused by a musket bullet, sprang for the bowsprit of the English ship, grasped a rope, drew himself up, and scrambled aboard. Realizing that the brave old sailor was alone on the deck of the English ship, Lieutenant Biddle instantly jumped on the hammock cloth and strove to follow him. As he gained the rail and leaped for the bowsprit, he was pulled so violently backward that he fell to the deck.

Captain Jones, seeing that it was impossible to stop the men, had called away all boarders. Ned

IN THE WASP'S NEST

Boston, with the fleetness of a deer, had leaped from the forecastle and run, sword in hand, along the gangway, to the place where the two ships ground and beat upon one another in the awful sea like two savage animals locked in a deadly embrace and tearing furiously at one another.

As Lieutenant Biddle strove to clamber up the steep bows of the enemy, Ned caught him by the coat-tails in his excitement, thinking to use him as a bridge by which to board. But the weight of the midshipman overbalanced the officer, and, aided by a heavy roll of the ship, they both fell to the deck together.

The ships were tossing and grinding against each other like angry monsters in the tremendous seas. With a muttered curse Biddle scrambled to his feet, picked up the midshipman, who followed him close, and crying: "You want to board, do you? You shall," leaped on the rail with him, threw him recklessly up on the brig's forecastle, grasped a trailing rope, and swung himself aboard, followed hard by Lieutenant Rodgers and the rest of the boarders.

The sight that met the eyes of the Americans beggars description. While she was apparently unharmed aloft, the brig's hull had been beaten into a pulp. Old Jack Lang stood alone on the forecastle with his arms folded about his cutlass, that trick of position he had, staring aghast at the scene before him. In all his experience of warfare, dating from the day he had participated in the horrible and awful



· Old Jack Lang stood alone on the forecastle. ·

THE *WASP* TAKES THE *FROLIC*

battle between the *Bon Homme Richard* and *Serapis*, with its terrible tale of killed and wounded, he had never seen such a slaughter. The deck was covered with dead and wounded. Every gun on the port side had been dismounted. The bulwarks had been smashed into gaping holes. The deck was red with the blood of the slain, washing to and fro with the bodies with every roll or heave.

Way aft at the wheel there was a single blood-stained old sailor grimly clutching the spokes. Besides this brave man and three officers not a soul was standing on the deck, and two of the officers were so badly wounded that they could not stand alone, but were forced to support themselves by leaning against the rail. The third officer, who was also wounded, as a token of surrender threw his sword on deck with a groan of anguish, and covered his face with his hands. Everybody had been shot down.

The Americans stopped a moment awe-struck, as Lang had been, at the horrible spectacle. Then Lieutenant Biddle picked his way aft, carefully stepping over the bodies of the dead and dying, and with his own hand struck the British flag, whipping fiercely out in the swift gale of that October morning.

The fire of the *Wasp* had been appalling in its destructiveness. While the English had been shooting the masts and spars out of her she had been concentrating her shot upon the hull of the doomed brig.

IN THE WASP'S NEST

The heavy bullets from the American carronades had smashed through and through her. The fearful raking she had received at short range had swept the decks of her men. She was a helpless ruin. Never in the history of sea fighting had there been a victory more complete or more terrible to the defeated.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE *WASP* IS CAPTURED

THE prize proved to be the British war-brig *Frolic*, twenty-two guns and one hundred and ten men, of whom ninety had been killed or wounded, or over eighty per cent., almost an unparalleled percentage of loss in ship actions. The *Frolic* was a slightly larger ship than the *Wasp*, carrying four more guns, the total weight of shot of her broadside being two hundred and ninety-two pounds, as against two hundred and forty-nine for the *Wasp*, yet she had been cut to pieces and her crew practically destroyed by the smaller and weaker ship in forty-three minutes, which was the time elapsing between the firing of the first gun and the striking of the flag of the prize.

As soon as he struck her flag Lieutenant Biddle hailed the *Wasp*, telling Captain Jones the name of her prize, and describing her battered condition and the frightful loss among the crew. On board the *Wasp* five men had been killed and only five wounded. The wounded had been at once attended to, and Jones immediately sent his surgeon and surgeon's mate aboard the *Frolic*, with instructions for them to do everything possible for the British

IN THE WASP'S NEST

wounded. He also left Biddle and Rodgers on the prize with the boarders for the present, ordering them to do what they could to get the *Frolic* in shape, to be taken into port if possible, while he and his men attempted to repair the damage sustained by the *Wasp*.

The two ships had scarcely parted, however, when, to add to the confusion on board the defeated vessel, both her masts carried away, the mainmast going close to the deck and the foremast leaving a stump some twelve feet high. The precarious condition of the prize, wallowing in the trough of the sea, made it necessary to get rid of the dead cumbering her decks without delay. The safety of the living demanded it, and the claims of the wounded were paramount to everything. Therefore the bodies of the slaughtered English sailors were silently and regretfully cast overboard, without further ceremony than a quiet prayer here and there by some devout man, if such there chanced to be among the American seamen, who at once busily set about clearing away the wreck and endeavoring to rig a jury mast, which would permit them to get the vessel before the wind. The wounded men received every possible attention. If they had been fierce and determined enemies in battle, the poor, suffering English seamen found them correspondingly tender and kind-hearted after the action was over.

With his little heart wrung beyond expression by

THE *WASP* IS CAPTURED

the horrors of the scene, which grew upon him with every passing minute as the heat of action evaporated and cooled his blood, Ned Boston worked with the rest. He was too small to be of much service in clearing away the wreck, and Lieutenant Biddle finally detailed him to help the two surgeons and their mates below in the cock-pit and on the berth-deck, whither the many wounded had been placed.

The little fellow carried water, handed instruments, administered draughts, held the hands of struggling, screaming boys as young as himself, who had been cut to pieces by the American fire, and were being operated upon without anæsthetics, which were unknown in that day, and behaved himself like the kind-hearted little hero he was. The busy doctor finally noticed that he grew paler and paler under the sickening tasks and at last sent him up on deck.

The boy clambered painfully up the ladders until he reached the deck, when his knees gave way beneath him. He sank down on a carronade slide and wept sick, bitter tears. It was old Jack Lang who discovered him. The scenes through which he had passed had been too much for him, and the reaction was so great that he could no longer control himself.

“Wot’s the matter, Master Ned?” said the sailor, gently laying his hand on the boy’s head. “Be ye hurt, sir?”

IN THE WASP'S NEST

"No, no, Lang, but, oh, the horror on this awful ship! Isn't it dreadful?"

"Dreadful indeed, sir," answered Lang, solemnly. "I never seed nuthin' like it. W'y, if we hadn't boarded w'en we did, there wouldn't 'a' been a man left alive on her."

"What have you done with the dead bodies?"

"Put 'em overboard, sir," answered the sailor. "We had to do it."

"Without a prayer?"

"No time for prayin' now, sir."

"No, I suppose not—but—but—I can't bear it."

"I knows how ye feel, sir," said the old man. "War's a terrible thing at best, an' I've fit in four of 'em. But don't ye give way, sir, you'll git used to it."

"Yes, I suppose so," answered the boy, choking down his sobs, "and yet to think that anybody could get used to this," he added, with a sweep of his hand and a glance which took in the ship.

Though the effect of the fire of the *Wasp* was painfully apparent, yet some sort of order had been evoked out of the chaos. The guns had been secured, the wreck cleared away, a small sail bent on the stump of the foremast, and the vessel got before the wind. So busy had been the men at the work, however, that they did not notice a larger ship, rapidly coming up before the wind, until she was close aboard them. Then one of the men happened to glance aft and saw her.

THE *WASP* IS CAPTURED

"Sail ho!" he shrieked, in sudden surprise and alarm.

Alarm indeed, for the ship approaching so rapidly was undoubtedly an enemy. One glance told Biddle and the rest that she was a ship-of-the-line, and could be no other than an English ship, for the American navy at that time possessed no battle-ships. Under her three topsails and jib and spanker she swept rapidly past the helpless *Frolic*, over which she threw a single shot, and headed away for the *Wasp*, now some distance off.

When she had been sighted from that ship, some time before, Captain Jones, in desperation, had ordered the reefs shaken out of his fore and mizzen-top-sails, and then attempted to set his foretop-gallant, in spite of the half-gale still blowing, but when he did so he discovered that the sails had been cut to pieces in the gaskets. He was unable to fly and powerless to fight. A battered eighteen-gun sloop-of-war could not contend for a moment against a seventy-four.

When the liner swept alongside, threw a shot over the ship, and ordered him to surrender there was nothing left for the captain to do but to obey. With tears of mortification they struck their flag, and found themselves a prize to His Britannic Majesty's ship-of-the-line *Poictiers*, Captain John Poer Beresford.

CHAPTER XIX

THE MAGNANIMITY OF THE ENGLISHMAN

IN obedience to a hail the *Wasp* was hove to and was presently boarded by a cutter from the *Poictiers*. A lieutenant, followed by a little squad of marines and a heavily armed boat crew, climbed to the deck of the sloop-of-war, being received at the gangway by Captain Jones and his officers. Touching his hat politely the lieutenant remarked :

"Sir, I am Lieutenant John Bentham, of His Britannic Majesty's ship-of-the-line *Poictiers*, Captain John Poer Beresford. You are——?"

"Captain Jacob Jones, of the United States sloop-of-war *Wasp*," returned the unfortunate American commander, tendering his sword.

"I am ordered, sir," said Lieutenant Bentham, waving the proffered weapon gracefully aside, "to take charge of your ship, and Captain Beresford, my commander, requests you to come on board his ship at once, with such of your officers as we can accommodate in the cutter. I see that you have just passed through a severe action."

"Yes, sir."

"And you were fortunate enough to capture your enemy?"

MAGNANIMITY OF THE ENGLISHMAN

"We were."

"What brig is that?"

"It was formerly His Britannic Majesty's brig sloop *Frolic*."

"What! Not Whinyates' brig?"

"I believe so, sir."

"Where is his convoy?"

"Off yonder," said Captain Jones, pointing. "He made such a stout resistance that we have been unable to pursue as yet, although we were hoping to overhaul them before nightfall."

"Gad!" said Bentham, "It's lucky we came along. The *Frolic* seems to be pretty badly cut up."

"I regret to say, sir," added Jones, "that her casualties are very heavy, so far as I am able to learn."

"Is it so, indeed? By the way, what are yours?"

"Five killed and five wounded."

"Is it possible? But I shall have to close this interesting conversation, and ask you to go aboard the *Poictiers*. Mr. Seagrave," said Bentham, stepping to the side and calling down to the midshipman in charge of the boat, "I will send you down the cutter's crew, and you can carry Captain Jones of the *Wasp* and other of his officers over to the *Poictiers*. Tumble in there, men!" he continued, and immediately the members of the boat crew resumed their places at the thwarts.

IN THE WASP'S NEST

"Now, sir," he said politely to Captain Jones, with a wave of his hand toward the gangway.

The captain stepped forward, stopped a moment and took a long look around his beautiful ship, lifted his hat and saluted the place where the flag had flown so triumphantly at the gaff end, and with a choking feeling in his throat, although he maintained a grave and impassive face, swung himself down the battens, followed by two or three of his officers, seated himself in the stern-sheets of the cutter, and was soon on the way to the huge ship-of-the-line towering massively before them.

Oh, he thought bitterly, as he watched the magnificent structure tossing and heaving on the seas, and marked the triple row of great guns protruding from the many-pierced side of the war monster, oh, that he had had a ship-of-the-line under his command, or even a frigate like the great *Constitution*! He would not have struck without a blow. But with the helpless little sloop *Wasp*, badly disabled from the conflict of the morning, to fight the liner would have been murder to his men and suicide to himself. His surrender was simply inevitable. Summoning to his aid, therefore, such philosophy as he possessed, he mounted the side of the *Poictiers*. The officer of the watch met him and conducted him aft to the high poop, where the captain of the great liner awaited him.

"The fortune of war, sir, has made my sloop

MAGNANIMITY OF THE ENGLISHMAN

the prize of your great battle-ship, Captain Beresford," said Jones, bowing low and tendering his sword.

"Sir," said the English captain, magnanimously, "if I may judge from appearances, you have shown yourself so worthy to wear your sword by the battle of the morning that I beg you to retain it. We have guessed that yon hulk is the *Frolic*, with which Whinyates undertook to convoy a lot of traders from the West Indies to London?"

"You are right, sir. It is the *Frolic*."

"You seem to have used her terribly, sir," said the British officer, curiously. "I don't understand it. Mr. Stenton," he called out to the first lieutenant, "send the cutter back to the—what did you say your ship was called, sir?"

"The American sloop-of-war *Wasp*."

"Ah, yes, exactly. Send the cutter back to the *Wasp*. Tell Mr. Bentham to keep hove to until further orders, then do you swing our yards and run down toward the *Frolic*. Do you know anything about her casualties, Captain Jones?"

"I regret to say that they are very severe. She only surrendered when she became entirely helpless. In fact, when my men boarded they were forced to strike her flag with their own hands."

"Is Captain Whinyates killed?"

"Badly wounded, sir, but not dead when I left him."

"Did you—er—take his sword?"

IN THE WASP'S NEST

"No, sir. I thought he had earned the right to keep it."

"That was very handsome of you, Captain Jones, and be assured I shall remember it. By the way, you seem to be pretty well cut up aloft yourself, sir. What loss have you sustained? Shall I send you a surgeon?"

"I am thankful to say that we had but five killed and five wounded. It will not be necessary to send a surgeon. In fact I sent both my surgeon and his mate on board the *Frolic* to do what they could for the many wounded, and they are still there."

"Most handsome, sir, most handsome of you," answered the English captain.

While this conversation had been carried on the ponderous yards of the *Poictiers* had been swung, and she had gathered way gently and moved down to the *Frolic*, slowly swashing along in the fierce wind through the tremendous seas.

"I have a mind to go aboard her myself," said Captain Beresford, as his huge ship was hove to close to the prize. "If you like you may accompany me. I suppose you have hardly had opportunity to examine your former prize, sir."

Alas that unlucky word "former" which the British captain had unintentionally emphasized!

"Not yet," answered Jones. "We were so busy trying to get the sloop in shape again that we had time for nothing else. I should like very much to go."

MAGNANIMITY OF THE ENGLISHMAN

The captain's gig was soon manned and the two officers were rowed over to the *Frolic*. Sure no ship so belied her name as this floating charnel house.

"Good God!" exclaimed Beresford, starting back aghast as he stepped aboard the wrecked brig and saw the havoc wrought by the *Wasp's* guns. "To think of it! To think of it! A British ship beaten, knocked into a cocked hat, and her crew swept out of existence in—how long did you say, sir?—forty minutes, by an American of less size and force! I could understand the *Constitution's* victory over the *Guerrière*. She was a much larger and heavier ship than ours. But this! Great heavens. She is a wreck. I don't understand it."

"Captain Beresford," said Jones, "this is Mr. Biddle, my first lieutenant. This is Mr. Rodgers, and this is Midshipman Boston, who have been endeavoring to get the prize—the former prize—in shape."

The three officers bowed formally and gravely tendered their swords.

"Gentlemen," said the Englishman, bowing in his turn, "retain your swords, I beg of you. Where is Captain Whinyates?"

"Below with the surgeon, sir," answered Biddle.

"What are the casualties of the brig?"

"I believe she carried one hundred and ten men, sir. There are not now twenty aboard who are not hurt."

"What have you done with the dead?"

IN THE WASP'S NEST

"We were forced to throw them overboard to clear the wreck. The demands of the living, the wounded, that is, were so great that we had no time to spare for those who had been killed."

"Where is the first lieutenant?"

"Wounded."

"The second?"

"Dead."

"The master?"

"Killed."

"The Bo's'n?"

"Dying."

"Merciful heavens! Is there no officer alive and unhurt?"

"Some of the midshipmen, sir."

"Take me below," said the English captain. "I must see Whinyates."

Down in his own berth, which had been riddled with shot, but which had been patched up temporarily, lay the unfortunate English captain.

"Whinyates," said Beresford, compassionately bending over his brother officer, "I am glad to see you. We have recaptured you."

"Thank you for that, Beresford," groaned the wounded English captain.

"Are you badly hurt?"

"A bullet through my leg and a wound in the forehead. I shall pull through all right, the surgeon says. I wish the Yankees had killed me," he groaned, in his humiliation and despair.

MAGNANIMITY OF THE ENGLISHMAN

"Don't say that, old man," remarked Beresford, pityingly. "However, you are not in condition to resume your command, are you?"

"No," said the other, "I am not. Good God, my heart's broken! To be beaten by an American and to be cut to pieces at that!"

"Never mind, old fellow," said Beresford, cheerily, "you put up a stiff fight, our American friend says."

"What are their casualties? Tell me the truth?"

"He says five killed and as many wounded."

"And we have ninety! That tells the story," responded Whinyates, bitterly.

"How has he treated you and your men?" asked Beresford, feeling it impossible to say anything encouraging.

"Handsomely! They have done everything that could be done. Left me my sword and sent their surgeon to assist my own."

"I tell you what I'll do. Is the brig seaworthy?"

"I think so. At least it can be made so. Probably she is already tight. They have been working over her for a couple of hours."

"Well, then, I shall leave you in command, but I will send a lieutenant aboard to do the work, and I think I'd better convoy you and the prize back to the Bermudas."

"Thank you, Beresford."

IN THE WASP'S NEST

"Not at all. Is there anything more we can do for you?"

"Nothing. I wish to God I could die! But Beresford, I want to tell you one thing. No English hand struck our flag. By heavens, we'd have gone down all standing, but they caught us and raked the life out of us, and then swarmed aboard. There were only three officers left on the deck, and only one man at the wheel, and he was wounded. All three of us were wounded, and two could not stand without support. Isn't it awful?"

"Never mind, Whinyates. You're not the first captain that struck to an American. Witness Dacres in the *Guerrière*."

"Ah, yes, but he had a weaker ship, while I——"

The poor Englishman turned to the wall and groaned in his misery. Beresford, unable to supply any comfort, walked out of the cabin. When he regained the deck, as he approached Captain Jones, he put out his hand.

"Captain Jones," he said, "I find that you have behaved with the greatest magnanimity and kindness toward my countrymen. I want to express my appreciation of your handsome conduct, sir, and to assure you that I shall repay it to the best of my power. I must, of course, take you on board the *Poictiers*, and your crew also, but everything consistent and possible will be done for your and their comfort. If your officers will give their parole,

MAGNANIMITY OF THE ENGLISHMAN

they may have the freedom of the ship. I shall be only too happy if you will consent to share my cabin. We are a large ship and not overmanned. As it happens, you have a small crew. Our ward-room can take in your lieutenants, and we can find room in the steerage for your midshipmen. You may go back to your ship and have your private baggage packed up and brought off. It is my purpose to take the three vessels back to the Bermudas, where you will be speedily exchanged, no doubt."

"Captain Beresford, your behavior is most generous and I deeply appreciate it," responded Jones, touched and pleased at the other's manly words. "I will gladly give you my parole in behalf of my officers and men. There is one subject, however, that I must speak about. It is a delicate matter, yet you have been good enough to say that I treated the men of the *Frolic* with humanity and kindness. I would not mention it if you had not spoken of it. I claim no exemption on that account. 'Tis a simple duty of an officer and gentleman. But, sir, may I beg that there will be no scrutiny of my crew and that there will be no attempt to impress any of my seamen? So far as I know, they are all Americans. I will frankly admit to you, however, that one or two of them have, at different times, been impressed on British men-of-war, and in their behalf I beg you—in short, will you not be magnanimous and make no scrutiny?"

IN THE WASP'S NEST

"Captain Jones," answered Beresford, "I repeat, sir, that I owe you much for the humanity you exhibited and that I appreciate the spirit that has governed you. It shall be as you wish."

"I will pledge you my word of honor, Captain Beresford, that the men to whom I refer, to the best of my knowledge and belief, are American citizens. I would not wish them to suffer because of their English service."

"I will close my eyes, Captain Jones, to any such conditions," returned the Englishman, extending his hand, which the American sailor warmly clasped. "Now that everything is arranged, will you go over to the *Wasp*, and prepare for your visit with me?"

It was such amenities as these between the navies of the two nations, when war was once begun, that softened its horrors, and eventually laid the foundation for friendships, which the final peace enabled to grow strong and deep.

Before nightfall Captain Jones and his officers had been transferred to the *Poictiers*, the lost spars on the *Wasp* had been replaced, a workable jury rig had been got up on the brig, and the three vessels bore away to the southward and headed for the Bermudas.

Captain Jones had caused word to be passed among the crew that there would be no scrutiny of his seamen for British deserters, and the news had lifted a terrible weight from the heart of old Jack Lang, who had been impressed upon a British man-

MAGNANIMITY OF THE ENGLISHMAN

of-war, from which he had escaped just before the war broke out. When they were captured he had anticipated nothing else than that he should be flogged to death in the unfortunate situation in which he found himself.

CHAPTER XX

NED BOSTON CHAMPIONS THE UNITED STATES

THE discomfited, downcast midshipmen of the *Wasp* were welcomed with much cordiality to the steerage of the *Poictiers* by her midshipmen, who took their cue from their magnanimous captain and began by doing everything in their power to make their prisoners comfortable. The Americans responded to their efforts and, boylike, began to forget their sorrows; all, that is, but Ned Boston, the youngest of them all. His little soul had been so tried that day, first by the excitement of the battle, next by the terrible scene he had witnessed when he boarded the *Frolic*, and the horrors that he had participated in while he had been assisting the surgeons, and lastly by the recapture of the ship, which had added the last touch to his heart-broken depression, that he found himself utterly unable to join in the skylarking with which the older and more experienced lads strove to throw aside the appalling impressions of the terrible day they had passed.

After supper, and before the night watches were set, the Americans, with all the English who could be spared from their stations, were congregated in

NED CHAMPIONS THE UNITED STATES

the steerage discussing the events of the day. Ned sat on a transom in the darkest corner, taking no part in the conversation. The novelty of the situation had worn away. The English lads, who had become somewhat used to the presence of the Americans and no longer regarded themselves exactly as hosts, began to exhibit a tendency to make slighting remarks. Mindful of Captain Jones's strict instructions, the Americans controlled themselves as best they could, although the situation was rapidly becoming so strained that something was sure to happen.

Strangely enough, the smallest of the group of Americans focussed the storm upon himself. The conversation had turned on the battle. The longer the English considered it the more angry they became at the thought of the overwhelming victory of the *Wasp*. They sought to explain it by innuendoes and suggestions of various sorts, all implying something unfair on the part of the American ship. These insinuations were difficult to resent, for they were not sufficiently definite to be contradicted, and matters were fast becoming unbearable when the attention of the youngest of the English midshipmen, a youngster named Hodson, was attracted by the sound of a sob to the corner of the steerage, in which Boston sat huddled up in a disconsolate little heap.

"Hey, what's this?" he called out, breaking out of the crowd and stepping toward the corner.

IN THE WASP'S NEST

"Show a light here, gentlemen. Blast my eyes, if it isn't the little Yankee reefer bawling like a baby! What are you snivelling about, you little calf?"

As he spoke there was a general outburst of uproarious laughter from the English midshipmen. Van Cleave, Claxton, and Ten Eyck immediately stepped forward with flushed faces and clenched fists to defend their comrade. The English midshipman's insolence, however, had pierced through Boston's melancholy misery, and with his face aflame the youngster leaped to his feet and sprang into the midst of the excited midshipmen grouped under the lamp.

"What do you mean, you little cur," he cried, "by calling me a baby and a calf? If you want to know why I was crying, I'll tell you! I was crying because we didn't have time enough to do more damage to your rickety old tub of a *Frolic* before you came down, and I was crying because we didn't have a ship big enough to take this one. That's what I was crying for!"

All this, of course, was not a word of it true, but it was nevertheless very effective.

"You lie!" said the English lad, promptly, and with equal promptness Boston struck him a resounding slap in the face.

The oldest English midshipmen and Van Cleave at once sprang between the two excited boys.

"It will be some time, sir," said Dashwood, the

NED CHAMPIONS THE UNITED STATES

older of the two, who was, by tacit consent, the leader of the steerage on the *Poictiers*, addressing Van Cleave as the ranking American midshipman, "before these young gentlemen will have opportunity to settle their differences with the weapons of their rank and station."

He meant, by this remarkable sentence, swords and pistols! Duels were common even among the smallest midshipmen in those bloodthirsty days, and the remark of the Englishman was not greeted with that amusement that such a statement would produce to-day.

"You're quite right, sir," said Van Cleave, with equal gravity. "I take it upon myself to represent Mr. Boston. Indeed, in view of the tender age of both parties to this quarrel, I think it would be better," he continued, "to let them fight it out now."

"Exactly my own views, sir," said the English youth.

"And," continued the American, smoothly, "if you desire and are willing to stand in your principal's shoes, I shall be glad, when we are exchanged, to take upon myself the full responsibility for Mr. Boston's words or actions and meet you with any weapon at the first convenient opportunity."

"Sir, you do me proud," said the Englishman, promptly. "Meanwhile, we'll let the youngsters fight it out right now."

"They are very small," interposed Claxton, "for

IN THE WASP'S NEST

champions, but I propose, gentlemen, that we let this—er—discussion take away all the enmities which are so rapidly coming to a head, as we have all noticed, and that, whatever the result may be, we will remain peaceable until the end of the cruise."

"You're right again," said Dashwood. "In fact, gentlemen, I am ashamed that I should have allowed any of my men to go so far, since you are our prisoners, I should say, but I suppose there is no help for it now."

"If the blooming little American will apologize for striking me, I'll let him off," said the doughty Mr. Hodson, who had been constituted the champion of the steerage.

"If you come out from behind that big fellow," cried Ned, promptly, "I'll slap you again!"

"Wough!" roared the English boy, struggling to get away from Dashwood, "let me get at him!"

"Now, you youngsters," said the leader of the steerage, calmly, "mind you fight fair! No biting, no kicking, no gouging allowed! Mr. Van Cleave," indicating the American, "agrees with me, and we'll both see fair play is done. The rest of you keep back and give them plenty of sea-room. Now pile in, and whenever either of you gets enough of it, say so, and the affair will be closed."

Both boys had hastily torn off their jackets. The English lad was slightly taller and heavier than Boston and he had the advantage of a year in age, but they were a very good match indeed. They

NED CHAMPIONS THE UNITED STATES

flew at each other like young wild-cats. Neither of them displayed any science or skill in the manner in which they handled their fists, and their excitement rendered most of their blows innocuous more or less. They wrestled furiously together for a few moments, when Hodson succeeded in pushing Boston to the deck. He leaped on him at once, but the two midshipmen summarily hauled him off. Boston scrambled to his feet again, and responding with a fierce negative as to whether he had had enough of it, they were turned loose upon each other once more.

The English lad soon found that if Boston could cry he could also fight; as he rushed recklessly in again, thinking to repeat his former success, by a lucky chance Boston got in a solid blow on the nose of his opponent, and the blood spurted. In spite of this, however, they clenched and went down again, the American beneath as before. Again they were pulled apart and again the battle was joined. With monotonous regularity the younger American boy appeared to be getting the worst of it, but strange to say his fire and intensity grew with every fall, until Hodson, who was as plucky as most boys are, actually began to quail before the lad who could take so much beating and come up so smilingly and so confidently after every fall.

As the feeling stole upon him that he was face to face with the unconquerable, the force of his own attack diminished. In the last rush he came to

IN THE WASP'S NEST

grief. His foot slipped, Boston struck him heavily at the same time, then leaped upon him and sent him crashing to the deck. His head struck a ring bolt and the shock stunned him. As they dragged the American away from the British lad, and held him tightly, he glared down at his prostrate foe, shouting, furiously,

"Have you had enough? Call me a baby, will you? Have you had enough?"

"He can't speak," said Dashwood, stooping down and examining him; "he has been stunned. In his behalf, however, I will say, as he is incapable of continuing the fight, he must have had enough."

"You're right, Dashwood," exclaimed a feeble voice from the deck, "I have." Hodson struggled to his feet. "Where is that young American wild-cat?" he asked.

"I'm here," said Boston, coming up with clenched fists.

"I'm proud to know you," said the English lad, rising and turning toward him, "you're a gentleman and an officer. I never saw a man before who could take so much licking as you got and win out at the end! You can cry all you want to. You are no calf and no baby. You're a man, and I am proud to have met you. Put it there. Let's be friends," he said, extending one hand and wiping the blood from his face with the other.

The two antagonists then shook hands amid the cheers of the steerage. The enmity that had been

NED CHAMPIONS THE UNITED STATES

engendered was thus dispelled, and they were all engaged in pledging each other and vowing eternal friendship when the master-at-arms thrust his head in the door of the steerage and remarked, grimly, "Two bells, young gentlemen. Put out lights!"

The voyage to the Bermudas thereafter was a pleasant one. When they reached the islands good news awaited them. Captain Jones and his crew, intact, as Captain Beresford had magnanimously promised, were exchanged for Captain Dacres of the *Guerrière* and a like number of his crew, and were sent back to the United States in a cartel.

Congress voted \$25,000 prize money to be divided among the officers and crew of the *Wasp* to reimburse them for the loss they had sustained in the recapture of the *Frolic*. It also awarded Master Commandant Jones a gold medal and promoted him to the rank of captain. Each of the other officers received a silver medal, and no little breast heaved with more pleasure under such an honorable burden than did Master Ned Boston's when Captain Jones, with kindly words of commendation, pinned it on him.

Taking his share of the prize money and his medal, and accompanied by old Jack Lang, whose "ol' woman" had died and his children had scattered long since, Midshipman Boston, on a leave of absence, returned to his home to display the trophies of his prowess, expend his prize money, and delight

IN THE WASP'S NEST

his adopted father, old Commodore Little, with the story of his exploits.

But a few months had elapsed since he had started out upon his naval career, yet there had been wrought a great change in him. Some of the sweetness and much of the innocence of his character had vanished, but other things had taken their place. He had mingled with men. He had fought in battles. He had braved storms. He had failed, and he had succeeded. One would scarcely have dreamed that a few months could compass so much and make so mighty a change in a small boy. He was manlier than he had ever been, yet the old Commodore's wife, to whom he had been as her own child, wept over the change. He would never be again, as he had been in the past, "her little boy," as she had affectionately called him.

CHAPTER XXI

OLD FRIENDS ARE MET TOGETHER

THE year that followed was one of comparative inaction for our hero. Captain Jones had been appointed to superintend the refitting of the fine frigate *Macedonian*, which Decatur had captured from the British in our old friend, the *United States*. After she had been thoroughly overhauled Jones was placed in command of her, and under the command of Commodore Decatur, still flying his broad pennant on his now famous frigate, the two ships, with the sloop-of-war *Hornet*, sailed on a cruise.

In the crew of the *Macedonian* were Midshipman Boston and Chief Boatswain's Mate Jack Lang. They had succeeded in rounding up Billy Bowline as well, and that young man was now the dashing captain of the foretop.

The three ships had scarcely cleared the land, however, when they were driven back to New London by two British ships-of-the-line, seventy-fours, and a heavy frigate. There, with the exception of the *Hornet*, which managed to slip away, they were blockaded for the rest of the war, and, although Commodore Decatur promptly challenged the block-

IN THE WASP'S NEST

aders and offered to fight any two frigates of equal size, with the *United States* and *Macedonian*, his challenge was never accepted, on one pretext or another, and the American ships had to bide quietly within the harbor.

It was very vexing to officers and men to be forced to keep their ships inactive, while their comrades were winning renown upon the high seas, but it was probably the best thing from one point of view that could have happened to Master Boston, for he made great progress in mastering the intricate duties of his profession. Old Jack Lang taught him every detail of knot-and-splice seamanship, until he could "Hand, reef, and steer" with any "A. B." aboard. Captain Jones himself deigned to supervise his lessons in navigation, and he even came frequently under the eye of the great Commodore Decatur, by his special favor dining with him more than once in the cabin of the *United States*.

Under these favorable auspices the young man, grown considerably taller and stronger than when he first entered the navy, made rapid headway. He laid a foundation which was full of promise, and, in short, bade fair, if he continued his progress, to be one of the most accomplished young officers of our brilliant navy. Having gone through two short cruises and one desperate battle, he was immune from the rough hazing he had been subjected to in the beginning of his naval service. Indeed,

OLD FRIENDS ARE MET TOGETHER

although he was still the youngest midshipman in the steerage, he was counted a veteran, and somewhat deferred to by older and larger lads who had not enjoyed his experience.

Commodore Decatur kept the two ships in a state of instant preparation. It could never be determined when an opportunity for escape might be afforded them, and he was resolved that no chances should be lost by any unpreparedness in his squadron. Consequently, like most of the officers, Ned Boston got little leave of absence, and, in fact, was rarely off his ship. He had not seen the kind old commodore who had adopted him since he had joined the *Macedonian*, although he had written and received frequent letters.

One pleasant day in April, 1814, a shore-boat was observed by the lookouts on the *Macedonian* pulling down the river from New London toward the *United States*. Shortly afterward the boom of cannon roared out in salute from the other frigate, and the idle observers on the *Macedonian* became aware of the fact that someone of distinction had boarded the flag-ship.

Captain Jones was on the alert, therefore, and when a few moments later Commodore Decatur's barge pulled around under the stern of the *United States*, and made for his own ship, he had everything in readiness for his reception. The commodore, in his brilliant uniform, was not alone in the stern sheets. There was with him in the barge

IN THE WASP'S NEST

a stout, quaint-looking, officer, in a curious, old-fashioned uniform, a three-cornered cocked hat covering his powdered naval wig.

Standing on the quarter-deck, watching the approaching boat, Captain Jones's eye fell upon the familiar figure, and he wondered, with a faint yet increasing sense of recognition, who could be with the commodore. But it was not until the two officers had been piped over the side, with all ceremony, that he recognized his old friend, Commodore Little, the sometime commander of the *Boston*.

The iron discipline of the ship prevented Master Ned, standing at attention with the other midshipmen on the port side of the quarter-deck to receive the two commodores, from making himself known, but the youngster's eyes were shining with delight for the summons that he knew would soon be made. Commodore Little was too thorough a disciplinarian, himself, to do more than glance at his adopted son. After standing, chatting, on deck a few moments, by Captain Jones's invitation, the three officers entered the ship's cabin, and a moment after the marine orderly on guard came up to the officer of the deck, saluted, and informed him, with the captain's compliments, that he wanted to see Midshipman Boston.

"Mr. Boston," said the officer, "you're wanted in the cabin."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the boy, touching his

OLD FRIENDS ARE MET TOGETHER

cap; and in a moment he was in the presence of his kind old friend. Restraining an impulse to throw himself into the arms of the old man he so loved, who had been so good to him, he stopped in the door, saluted again, and stood at attention. The three officers smiled approvingly at the evidence of discipline presented.

"By Jove, Jones!" said Decatur, "you must have beautiful discipline on this ship. Even natural affection is subdued by it."

"Well, Decatur," returned the other, smiling, "you know I have always held that even natural affection, itself, should be disciplined, and should give way to the customs of the service."

"Quite right, quite right, young gentleman," remarked the veteran of the past, apparently forgetful of the fact that the men he addressed were no longer midshipmen. "But having demonstrated your discipline I should like to have a nearer look at my boy, and with your permission——"

As he spoke the old gentleman opened his arms, and, with a glad cry of delight, Ned threw himself enthusiastically upon him.

"So, so," said the old man, gently thrusting him back at arm's length, after a hearty hug, and looking him over carefully, "he looks quite a sailor; doesn't he, lads? Nay, boy, never blush to be called a sailor. Well, I always knew he would make one; eh, gentlemen? Do you remember that christening on the old *Boston*, Jones, with Commo-

IN THE WASP'S NEST

dore Barry and you and Decatur for godfathers, and Talcott and Blakely and myself and Jack Lang? By the way, where is the old man? Do you know anything about him?"

"He is my chief bo's'n's mate," answered Jones.

"Is that so? I want you to give him up."

"Give him up, sir! Why?" in great surprise.

"Well, you see, Blakely—you remember Blakely, of course?—he was one of my midshipmen when we knocked *Le Berceau* into a cocked hat, you know, and we picked up this youngster—well, he has been promoted from the *Enterprise* to the command of the new *Wasp*, just completed at Newburyport. The sloop they built to take the place of yours, you know, and in honor of your victory. By gad, sir, 'twas a famous fight! I would I'd been there!"

"Your young representative, however, did very well," said Jones, quietly; at which Master Boston flushed with pleasure.

"I am glad to hear it," said the old man.

"How could he be otherwise?" laughed Decatur, "with such a lot of fire-eating godfathers, and old Jones here to make us all respectable?"

"Quite so, quite so. And I remember," laughed the commodore, "that you were put in because the rest of us were so sedate. You thought we needed lightening a bit."

"Hush, Commodore!" said Decatur, in mock anxiety, "remember that I am a commodore myself

OLD FRIENDS ARE MET TOGETHER

now, and have a reputation for seriousness to sustain. For heaven's sake, don't ruin me with my associates!"

"But about Blakely and the *Wasp* and my chief bo's'n's mate, Commodore?" interrupted Jones.

"Well, you see, Blakely is making up a crew. He hasn't much choice. There is hardly a sailor man left on the coast. The big frigates and crack sloops have got the pick of the lot, the privateers have taken the balance, and by gad, sirs, he's had to man his ship practically with land lubbers! They are a mighty good set of men, so far as that goes, but scarcely an able seaman among them, I'm told. In fact, I've seen them myself, for I've just come from there. There is one thing they can do, they can shoot! Blakely said if he couldn't get sailor men, he'd get good shots anyway, so he was very careful about his selection."

"He was right," said Decatur. "He can make sailors out of them all right, if he has a few good veterans to sprinkle among them, and a few weeks under Blakely will teach them to handle anything, but it takes years to make a good shot. Sometimes I think good shots are like good poets. They are born, not made."

"That is true," said the old man. "Let me tell you, youngsters, we used to have some good shots on the old *Boston*."

"You did that."

"But I suppose you surpass us in that too. It

IN THE WASP'S NEST

was your wonderful gunnery, Jones, that knocked out the *Frolic*," said Commodore Little. "Well, there doesn't seem much chance for either of you to get out of this blockade yonder. Blakely thinks he can make out, as he probably can with his little ship, and—er—in short, I asked him if he would take Ned here as one of his midshipmen, provided you let him go, and he jumped at the chance. You know he and Talcott, who was lost at sea ten years ago—God rest him—really found this boy, and Blakely has been very much interested in him since. I want the lad to have another chance in active service, and although I couldn't wish him anything better than to sail under your command, Jones, yet I think he has had a long enough tour of duty in harbor. Will you let him go?"

"I don't want to a bit," returned Captain Jones, reluctantly, "but, as you say, there seems to be little chance of our getting out. Blakely's opportunities are greater, and if he wants the boy he may have him."

"And Jack Lang?" asked Commodore Little, insinuatingly.

"Now, you've got me there! That old man is the best seaman on the ship. Meaning no disrespect to the commodore's crew, or any other man's, I don't believe there is a better seaman in the United States navy, or any other navy on earth."

"Or water, you mean," interposed Decatur, lightly.

OLD FRIENDS ARE MET TOGETHER

"That's just why I want him, Jones," said Little, earnestly. "He'll be worth twenty men to Blakely with his green crew. I know you don't like to give up a man like that. I should not, myself, but I honestly think, my lad," continued the old man, leaning forward and laying his hand on the shoulder of the captain, "that you will be doing your country a great service by letting Blakely have this man. I know Blakely. The country's going to hear from that little 'tar-heel'—you know he is from one of the Carolinas—if he gets half a chance. Give him that chance, or help him to it. You've had yours and improved it gloriously. Let Lang go, won't you?"

"Give him up, Jones," said Decatur, persuasively. "Besides, you know it is a sort of poetic idea to let the young midshipman and the old bo's'n's mate leave together. It was Lang who nursed him when he was a baby, you remember."

"What do you say about it, Mr. Boston?" said Jones, turning to the lad who had stood trembling with excitement while the conversation was going on.

"Oh, Captain Jones!" he cried, "you know I'd never wish to leave you, sir. You have been so good to me and helped me so much. If the *Macedonian* could only get out, sir!"

"I see," said Jones, smiling kindly at the lad. "Well, at your age I think I'd have given up everything to have a chance to get in action. You shall

IN THE WASP'S NEST

go to Captain Blakely, my boy, but I want you to remember that all your training as a seaman you received under me on the old *Wasp* and the *Macedonian* here, under my own eye, sir, and I want you to represent me on the new *Wasp*. I want you to show your new messmates what sort of officers we turn out here. Hey, Commodore Decatur?"

"Quite right, Jones. The boy 'll do you credit, I'm sure."

"Thank you, thank you very much, gentlemen," said old Commodore Little. "I assure you I appreciate this."

"And how about Lang, sir?" broke in Ned.

"Well, I——" answered Jones, hesitatingly.

"Oh, please say yes, sir," urged Ned.

"All right," returned Jones at last, "he may go."

"Does the old man talk as much as ever?" asked Little.

"Almost," replied Jones, laughing, "but we let him run on pretty much as he pleases now. He is getting pretty old, but he's the primest seaman, the boldest man, and the best petty officer that I ever saw."

"Let's have him in here, will you?" asked Little. "I'd like to see him again."

"Certainly. Orderly, my compliments to the officer of the deck. Have him send the chief bo's'n's mate to my cabin."

In a few moments the huge bulk of the old man

OLD FRIENDS ARE MET TOGETHER

appeared in the doorway, and in obedience to Captain Jones's command he came rolling into the cabin. He stood with his arms folded, that little trick of position so familiar to the three officers and the midshipman, and appeared in no way abashed. True to his habit, he began the conversation himself.

"Yer sarvant, Commodore Decatur, an' yours, Cap'n Jones, w'ich you sent fer me, yer honor, an' here I be. It bein' one of the fust principles w'ich has actooated my life to obey orders without talkin'. As I tells the youngsters of the crew as answers back, which if you ain't got nuthin' to say, don't take up your sooperior officers' time by sayin' it. Eh, Master Boston?"

"Lang," said Decatur, laughing, "you're as hopeless as ever; but it seems to me that you ought to know this gentleman," he added, pointing to Little, who had kept in the background.

"In course, sir, an' I does, sir. Me an' him used ter be werry intimate together over Master Ned—beggin' yer pardon, Mr. Boston. If it hadn't been fer my efforts, w'ich I am pleased to say the cap'n helped me, he wouldn't be the best young officer of his inches an' years in the sarvice."

"You old rascal!" laughed Commodore Little.

"Yes, sir," continued the old sailor, "not only have I been thrown frequent with the commodore, but we've lived in the cabin together!"

"Yes, by gad!" said Little, "I never could tell who was captain, you or I."

IN THE WASP'S NEST

"You allus was, sir," said Lang, who had become a highly privileged character, and knew how far he could go; "though there was times w'en, if I'd been a talkative man, I mought have made so bold as ter give ye a bit of advice."

"What, what! About the ship, sir?"

"No, sir; but about the eddication an' keer of a babby."

"Orderly," said Captain Jones, amid the general laughter, "bid my steward mix a stiff can of grog, and bring it here. Gentlemen, the wine is at your elbow. Lang, the glass of grog is for you."

"Thankee, yer honor," said the old man. "I drinks to yer honor's health, an' to yours, an' to yours, an' to Master Boston's, an' gentlemen all," he added, bowing to each one of them, and taking a deep draught, "to the American Navy"—another draught—"an' to the ship we loves to serve on"—another draught—"an'——"

"Hold on, Lang! Save a little for the last toast."

"It's well ye spoke prompt, sir," returned the old man, holding the almost empty pannikin in the air.

"Drink to your new commander, and his new ship, Captain Johnston Blakely, of the *Wasp*."

"Be ye goin' to send me away, sir?" cried old Lang, in alarm.

"At the special request of Commodore Little, you are to accompany Midshipman Boston to the

OLD FRIENDS ARE MET TOGETHER

new ship. Captain Blakely has a green crew, a lot of backwoodsmen and farmers, and he wants you to lick them into good seamen."

"I hates to leave ye, Cap'n Jones," said Lang, after deliberately draining the cup. "I've know'd ye sence ye was a boy, an' a better officer—beggin' yer pardon, an' by yer leave, gentlemen—I never sailed under. Howsomever, it's only right an' proper that I should go with Master Boston, an' as fer them haymakers, I'll lick 'em inter shape, an' make 'em larn the ropes, an' train 'em inter prime seamen in three weeks, with the cap'n's consent, of course, w'ich I think, young Master Ned'll help me, er my name's not Jack Lang."

"I'll wager you will," said Decatur, "but you'll have an awful time talking against one hundred and seventy-five green Yankees, Lang."

"Trust me for that, yer honor. Fer a silent man, I hev some powers of speech, w'ich," he added audaciously, "I've picked up from my warious commanders in nigh onto fifty years of sea-sarvice."

"Well, get them in good shape for the *Wasp*," said Jones. "Meanwhile, get your dunnage together. I'll have your papers made out, and you can go with Commodore Little at once. I suppose Blakely will be glad to get hold of his men as soon as possible."

"He would," said Commodore Little, "and I'm sure he'll appreciate your kindness."

"Please, sir," broke out Boston again, "may we not take Billy Bowline?"

IN THE WASP'S NEST

"If I mought," suggested the old sailor, pausing in the door, "make so bold, I think it'd be a good idea to let me have Billy as a sort er deppity. Him an' me's been associated in nussin', w'ich ye sees the result before ye, an' if I've got to break in them farmers and haymakers, I'd order hev some un like Billy ter help me."

"Take him along," said Jones; "that is, if he wants to go. But don't ask for another soul! Now, Commodore, you've taken my best midshipman, my most experienced petty officer, and my smartest seaman. Is there anything else you want?"

"Nothing else, I think, unless another glass of this prime old Madeira, to drink your health in. Youngster, go and pack your chest, and bid farewell to your messmates. I'll wager," said Little, as the midshipman scampered out of the cabin, "that you'll be proud and glad that you let those men go to Blakely after all, Jones."

CHAPTER XXII

THE LITTLE PRIDE OF THE NAVY

ON the night of May 1, 1814, the brand-new sloop-of-war *Wasp* lay straining at her anchor in the harbor of Portsmouth, N. H. A few days before Ned Boston, accompanied by old Lang and Billy Bowline, had joined the ship, which was already provisioned and supplied for a long cruise.

Master Commandant Johnston Blakely, her commander, whom we have seen as a midshipman on the *Boston* years before, was born in Ireland, but had been brought to this country when he was about sixteen months old. His dark hair, fair complexion, and blue eyes, with the slightest touch of an inherited brogue, mellowed and softened by his southern upbringing, proclaimed his relationship to the Emerald Isle—as did also his joyous love of a good, hard fight. He had commanded the little brig *Enterprise* earlier in the war, but fate had not been kind to him and he had enjoyed little opportunity of distinction as yet. Those who knew him, however, predicted great successes for him, and it was confidently asserted by his friends and fellow-officers that no better seaman and fighter than this

IN THE WASP'S NEST

young Irish "tar-heel" captain was to be found in the American navy.

He had superintended the construction and equipment, at Newburyport, Mass., of the new *Wasp*, designed to take the place of the one captured by the *Poictiers*. He had personally inspected nearly every stick of timber that had gone into her, and had examined with jealous scrutiny all her masts, sails, rigging, and guns. Modifications in her plans had been made in accordance with his experience, and although he was not her designer she was in a measure his own creation.

He had been given practically a free hand in the selection of his officers. His first lieutenant, Reilly, and his third lieutenant, Baury, had seen much hard service, and as midshipmen on the great *Constitution* had taken brilliant parts in the actions between that famous frigate and the *Guerrière* and the *Java*. The second lieutenant, Tillinghast, had been aboard the *Enterprise* when she captured the *Boxer*. Every commissioned officer had seen hard service on various successful ships, and even the midshipmen, as young Boston, for instance, were not without valuable experience in actual battle. They were prime seamen every one of them.

They had to be ; for owing to the great scarcity of seamen, as has been stated, and the brilliant opportunity for making money afforded by privateering, and the superior demands of the famous frigates, Blakely had been forced to man his ship

THE LITTLE PRIDE OF THE NAVY

largely with landsmen from New England. There was not a man of foreign birth among them. From the great numbers who presented themselves for enlistment he had personally made careful selection, laying special emphasis upon youth, physical strength, vigor, and activity, and ability to shoot straight. Proficiency in the use of the rifle he well knew could be developed easily into proficiency in the use of the great gun. Like every American captain of that day and since, he placed great dependence on rapid and accurate gun-fire.

The captain's age was thirty-three. With the exception of old Jack Lang he was the oldest man on the ship! The average age of his crew, which numbered one hundred and seventy-three men and boys, was only twenty-three. They were a willing, hard, receptive lot, and being leavened by a few extremely reliable seamen in the chief petty officer's positions, and commanded by such able and brilliant young officers as he had chosen, he expected to round them into shape speedily and without difficulty.

While he was blockaded in the harbor he had exercised them continually, going over and over the complex evolutions for making and taking in sail, getting under way, reefing and furling, and going to quarters, until they knew those duties and performed the evolutions like veterans. Of course, at anchor they could learn nothing about manœuvring in a sea way, such as tacking, wearing, etc., but

IN THE WASP'S NEST

with a good basic knowledge of ropes, sails, and spars that would come in time.

One thing must be considered in estimating the worth of this remarkable crew, and that is the character of the captain. The long-legged, sinewy, gaunt, nasal-twanged New Englanders fairly adored him. He had that quality—call it magnetism, call it what you will—in his genial personality that attracts and holds men. They would do anything for him. Some of the older officers who had inspected the ship, as Commodores Hull and Bainbridge, predicted that in a short time—that is, after a month's hard cruising—Blakely would have a crew which could be matched with the best of them.

The average native intelligence of the *Wasp's* men was much higher than that of even a first-class crew of veteran men-o'-war's men. Intellectually, or, perhaps, better, by dint of their education, most of them could have looked down on their chief boatswain's mate; but his varied experience, his wide knowledge of the sea and ships, his thorough mastery of his profession, as well as his strength and his good-humor, made him at once looked up to and respected. He became as great a favorite on the forecastle as Captain Blakely was on the quarter-deck.

The *Wasp* was one of the most beautiful ships afloat. Sailor-men raved over her lines. She was built for speed, and she looked to possess it, yet her designers had not sacrificed strength or stability.

THE LITTLE PRIDE OF THE NAVY

Her spars were unusually lofty and heavy for a ship of her size, five hundred and nine tons, giving her a great spread of canvas. Her armament consisted of twenty short thirty-two-pound carronades, for close-action, and two long twelve-pounders, for chasing and playing at long-bowls. No expense had been spared in outfitting her. Her supply of small-arms was liberal, and of the best quality, and she represented the last and finest development of the naval architecture of her day.

Accustomed, as he had been, to the great frigates *Macedonian* and *United States*, little Boston's heart beat with pride when he found himself one of the trusted midshipmen of this crack ship. He vowed that he would let no opportunity for serving his country and distinguishing himself pass him by, and he thanked his kind guardian, old Commodore Little, when he bade him good-by, for having secured his appointment to so promising a cruiser.

The midshipmen's mess contained a number of agreeable young fellows, with some of whom he soon became on very congenial terms. Again he was almost the youngest reefer on the ship, but his experience, especially in the *Wasp-Frolic* fight, and his medal, which he wore pinned on his breast on occasions of ceremony, entitled him to consideration at the hands of the oldsters, some of whom had been long in the service without participating in a single hard fight.

The captain, who was a gentleman, every inch of

IN THE WASP'S NEST

him, and much more kindly and considerate in his ideas than the ordinary run of officers, even the best of them, discouraged any attempt at the brutal hazing so often prevalent, and though, of course, there was more or less of it in the steerage of the *Wasp*, yet it was not nearly so evident as on some other ships.

Where a dozen boys, whose training is in arms, are brought together in the constricted area of a five-hundred-ton ship-of-war, there is bound to be more or less friction, but Blakely, and his young officers, taking their cue from him, were wise enough not to attempt the impossible, and the boyish rows that ensued in the steerage were not serious, and engendered no lasting rancors, as was often the case in ships-of-war of that day. Besides Blakely calculated to give them so much to do in their legitimate work that their ebullient spirits would be fully occupied in fighting the enemies of their country.

Boston had sobered greatly in the year that had passed. The responsibilities of command had developed him. He no longer gave way to tears in occasions of emergency. He was taller and stronger, too, although still somewhat undersized, and was burning with zeal and ambition to make a name for himself in his chosen profession.

Since he had grown older he had thought often and often, in the loneliness of the long night watches, about the story of how he was found on the sea by the French ship and of his dead mother, too.

THE LITTLE PRIDE OF THE NAVY

When no one observed him he had studied the fair face pictured in the locket he always wore, and he had wondered and dreamed.

Sometimes aloft, with the ship beneath him, the sky above him, he had rocked to and fro, as she pitched and tossed in some lazy swell, and longed and prayed and hoped that he might sometime find out who he was, what his name was, what those three letters in the locket, "N. E. D.," stood for. Had he a father, or was he indeed alone?

Well, if he never found out, at least he resolved to make his assumed name known and respected, and that was a great object for his ambition.

CHAPTER XXIII

BREAKING THE BLOCKADE

OUTSIDE the mouth of Portsmouth harbor two big English frigates and a large sloop-of-war were closely blockading. For the *Wasp* to attempt to sail out in open day would be to invite her destruction. After all their preparations had been made, the men on the *Wasp* waited with such impatience as can well be conceived for a cloudy night and an off-shore gale in order to get to sea. This fortunate combination of weather conditions had come on the first of May, 1814.

The wind had been blowing strongly all that day down the harbor, and the ships outside, feeling the full force of it, could be seen beating to and fro under short canvas, striving to cover the entrance, but as the night fell dark and gloomy, the sky heavily overcast, the gale increasing, they were finally compelled to edge away, or they were driven to leeward by the violence of the tempest, leaving the way to escape comparatively open. Impatiently waiting until two bells in the first night watch, or about nine o'clock, to make sure that the wind would hold steady, and deciding at last that it gave promise of blowing hard all night, and was as black

BREAKING THE BLOCKADE

as pitch overhead, Blakely determined to weigh anchor and make a run for it.

The watch had been called, of course, but everybody had been persuaded that the captain would go out that night and no one had turned in. In fact, the tacit permission which had been given to everyone to stay on deck indicated too plainly the captain's intention. They were all ready, therefore, when the executive officer, Reilly, summoned Lang to the mast and bade him call all hands to get up anchor. There was a note of triumph in the deep voice of the old boatswain's mate as he rolled his call along the decks that sent a strange thrill into the hearts of the green hands among the crew.

"I think, Mr. Reilly," said the captain, "that we'll go out under our three topsails and a jib."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"After we clear yon headland, it may be necessary to reef down, but we'll try it first so. Did you notice what sail the blockaders carried?"

"When I last saw them, sir, they had double reefs on the fore and maintops'ls, with the mizzen-tops'l apparently close reefed, and a stays'l."

"Well, everything's new and of the best aboard of us, and we can stand a little stretching. At any rate, we must try it. Speed to-night is the most important requisite. You would better cast to port, sir, and the wind being fair for departure, we can weather the point without bracing up. By the way, I want every lantern on the ship extinguished ;

IN THE WASP'S NEST

don't show a light of any kind. After we get fairly outside send the men to quarters, too. Then cast loose and provide. If we come upon the enemy suddenly, a lucky broadside may save us. Above all, sir, let every man keep silent at his station."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the young lieutenant, heedfully.

"Not that anyone could be heard in this howling gale," continued the captain, "but 'tis just as well they should begin right, whatever the weather."

After this little colloquy had taken place, the orders were given, the men shipped the capstan bars and manned them. The rapid clicking of the pawls mingling with the tramp of their feet upon the deck indicated the eagerness with which they hove the ship forward until the anchor was up and down. The designated sail was then made, the braces manned, the anchor broken from the ground with a mighty heave, and while it was being catted and fished the ship swung to port.

As the sails caught the fierce wind she took a bone in her teeth, and, foaming at the mouth, lay over to port almost until the lee channels dragged, and so rushed for the open sea. The black water was dashed into milky whiteness by her sharp prow, and thrown away on either side of her bows in broad sheets of spray swirling under her counters and following in a turbulent wake astern.

It was easy enough going in the landlocked harbor, and the force of the fierce gale was so tem-

BREAKING THE BLOCKADE

pered by the shore as not to render the ship uneasy, but as she slipped past the point and got into the open ocean beyond she felt the full force of the storm and with increased speed dashed ahead, pitching and heaving tremendously.

Blakely stood on the weather side of the quarter-deck, staring up through the blackness at the cloud of canvas showing dimly above his head. The masts were creaking and groaning and buckling as the ship plunged along. The weather shrouds stood out taut and rigid as bars of steel. The wind was stringing them like a harp. The pace of the ship was fearful. It was the first opportunity they had enjoyed for trying her speed, and she more than fulfilled their expectations. If she could sail like that in a fresh breeze or a light wind she would be a wonder.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the captain, exultantly, "she is a flyer and no mistake. Eh, Mr. Reilly?"

"Yes, sir. If she goes like this in lighter weather, she'll show her heels to everything on the ocean."

"I think so. And as I intend to go in harm's way, it's a comfort to have something fast under us. What do you think of it? Can we carry those top-sails in this wind?"

Reilly leaned far over to windward and threw a long look aloft.

"It's a fearful strain, sir."

"You're right, Reilly," said Blakely. Then after

IN THE WASP'S NEST

a moment or two he added: "Double reef the tops'ls, sir. Get the stays'l on her instead of the jib. Bear a hand about it, too. I'd rather lose an arm than a mast now. It's a wild night for some of our farmers to go aloft," he soliloquized, as Reilly promptly gave the order. "But the quicker they are at it, the sooner they'll learn."

Although many of the green crew were beginning to feel qualmish at the violence of the motion of the ship, they had not been suffering long enough to have given up entirely, and they sprang into the rigging with alacrity. Led by some of the able seamen like Billy Bowline, who had his old post as captain of the foretop, they soon succeeded in getting the sails reefed down.

The diminished canvas greatly relieved the pitching and rolling of the ship, and did not sensibly decrease her speed. As she tore through the blackness Blakely judged that she might be approaching the proximity of the blockading ships. That is, if they still maintained their endeavor to beat up toward the shore against the gale, instead of running for it.

He had watched the blockading squadron many times during the fitting of the ship. He knew they were handled by prime seamen, and he judged they would not give up the blockade so long as it was possible to maintain it. Therefore, he sent the men to their quarters at the batteries, stationed the most experienced and keenest-eyed on the lookout, and

BREAKING THE BLOCKADE

finally himself went forward to the top-gallant forecastle and stood by the weather-rail, peering over the cathead.

The little ship was filled with subdued but intense excitement. A few hours ago her company had been a peaceful lot of farmers, hunters, mechanics, playing at being sailors, in the quiet waters of the harbor. Now, they were a body of sea-mariners, clustered around the guns, which had been loaded and primed for action. The thought thrilled them to the very heart. And on this black night they realized that they were free at last, rushing madly seaward before a sweeping northwest gale with the open ocean before them, and possibly a huge, overwhelming enemy lying in their path. They were too filled by their strange emotions to realize that in a short time they would be the sickest lot of men that ever tried to sail or fight a ship.

Boston occupied his old position as midshipman of the forecastle. Consequently, he stood by the captain's side. Aft, Mr. Carr, the sailing master, was stationed to watch the helm, Mr. Reilly had charge of the batteries, with Mr. Tillinghast and Mr. Baury to second him. A line of midshipmen stood ready to pass the captain's orders, should he give any to Mr. Carr and the men at the wheel. The braces were led along the decks, with the able seamen to supervise each one of them, so that the yards could be promptly swung in any direction.

The ship was a picture of instant preparation.

IN THE WASP'S NEST

Not a sound of any sort was made by a human being on her. The wind was roaring through the top-hamper tremendously, and the ship creaked and groaned as she labored in the heavy sea. Captain Blakely leaned over the weather cathead, peering ahead as if he could pierce the Egyptian darkness surrounding them by the very eagerness of his gaze. Boston, who was one of the keenest-eyed youngsters on the ship, suddenly ran out between the knight-heads and stood on the bowsprit cap, clinging to the topmast stay and peering into the night.

"Sir," he cried instantly. "Yonder! A light! A ship!"

The boy spoke in a low, fierce tone, audible only to his commanding officer.

"Where away?" cried Blakely, instantly alert.

"There, sir, to starboard! Coming right in our way!"

There, ahead of them, on such a course that she must inevitably cross their path, could be seen the huge, black bulk of a ship, looming preternaturally large in the darkness, a faint light showing forward on her, and the sea breaking into gray whiteness on her water-line.

"Stand by the port battery!" the captain called out instantly, turning aft as he spoke. "But keep all fast untill I give the order."

The English frigate was braced sharp up on the port tack, the American sloop going free with the wind on the port quarter. Blakely quickly deter-

BREAKING THE BLOCKADE

mined to stand on as he was, until he was close aboard the enemy, then up with her helm, throw the *Wasp* off a couple of points, and slip by her, giving her a broadside with his port battery as he did so. The *Wasp* was near enough now. The English had at last caught sight of them. They were moving.

“Hands by the lee fore-braces!” he shouted, suddenly. “Get a hold of this weather stays’l sheet, flatten it aft, and bear the sail out to windward!” he cried to the fore-castle men.

He raised his deep, powerful voice to a perfect shout as he delivered his orders, concealment no longer being any object. Everything in the port battery was in readiness. The gun-captains tautened the lock-strings, the *Wasp* being one of the few ships of that day whose guns were fitted with gun-locks. Little groups of men clustered around the staysail sheets and the fore-braces. The two ships were close aboard now. The English ship was full of excitement at last. Wild, incoherent cries came up faintly against the fierce wind, unintelligible, yet indicative of surprise and alarm. It was full time—the *Wasp* was right abeam and coming hard and straight for the frigate. Was the stranger about to run them down? thought the English officers.

“Up with your helm! Hard up!” roared Blakely. “Brace sharp up forward! Haul over the head-sheets. Steady! Stand by the battery! Fire!”

IN THE WASP'S NEST

The handy *Wasp* wore round on her heel like a top. The blackness of the night was illuminated for an instant by a series of vivid flashes, followed by a cloud of smoke, blown away instantly by the rushing wind, and a deep roar, which died out suddenly under the scream of the tempest.

At close range the smashing bolts from the thirty-two pounders and the shot from the long twelves on the forecastle played havoc with the English ship. The *Wasp* rushed by like a spirit of the storm. In the noise and confusion, however, Blakely heard the crash of falling spars and the cries of excited men. The tremendous strain upon the masts and rigging of the English frigate had given a double value to the broadside of the *Wasp*. Every shot had told. Shrouds and stays were cut, the main topmast of the frigate had gone over the side, and the English captain, to save his ship from being a total wreck, had been forced to put her before the wind at once.

In a few moments the *Wasp* had left the cripple out of sight in the heaving sea. She had met her huge antagonist, struck her one tremendous blow, and vanished. Were it not for the wreck of the main topmast, for the gaping rents in the side, and for two or three groaning, wounded men upon the deck, and some who would never groan again, the English captain would almost have believed it a dream.

"We've settled that ship," said Blakely, grimly, yet complacently. "Mr. Boston, you saw her first.

BREAKING THE BLOCKADE

You will dine with me to-morrow in my cabin. You have done well, sir. Mr. Reilly, tell the men that I'm proud of them. I never saw anything more handsomely done. It augurs well for the success of our cruise. Let them splice the main brace with a good round tot of grog on this black night, and keep both watches on deck, sir, but let them lie down by the guns. We may run across another one."

Some of the men who had heard this communication raised a cheer.

"Silence!" roared the captain, in a voice of thunder. "Didn't you hear my order? We may be right on top of another ship. Not another sound, or I'll revoke the order about the grog!"

The *Wasp*, however, met no other of the blockaders. Morning broke bright and sunny. The eager lookouts swept the seas, and found not a sail in sight. The gale had abated somewhat, though it was still blowing fresh. Blakely shook the reefs out of the topsails, and then clapped on the topgallant sails. The watch was called and set, and the great cruise of the *Wasp* was begun.

CHAPTER XXIV

“TO SINK, BURN, AND DESTROY !”

THE first few days out had found about half the crew incapacitated by sea-sickness. Most of them had never been on blue water before. The captain, however, had insisted upon applying the very best remedy for that dire malady. He made them work like horses. Of course, they had not yet gained that instinctive ability to do the right thing in the critical moment without order or suggestion, which is the final mark of a good sailor, but they were learning with remarkable swiftness. They were young, ambitious, fairly well educated, and their progress was wonderful.

Fortunately, ample time was allowed them for mastering the routine duties of a sailor's life, for they encountered no ships of the enemy. None of any sort, in fact. Some of the few old salts growled at the situation. Your true old salt would not be happy unless he were growling at someone or something. Everybody expected it, and nobody minded. The officers, indeed, rather rejoiced at it, for it gave them time to get the crew into good, first-class fighting and sailing shape. They had plenty of hard weather going over, which gave them good practice. All

“TO SINK, BURN, AND DESTROY!”

hands grew enthusiastic over the qualities of the ship, too; no more speedy, handier vessel in all sorts of weather could be desired than the taut little sloop-of-war that carried them over the ocean.

Blakely possessed his soul in patience, and headed the vessel straight for the English Channel, where he felt sure they would have plenty to do, as it was the most frequented water on the globe. War was waged in that day very mercilessly, and the young captain had orders to sink, burn, and destroy whatsoever he came across, even private property, belonging to the enemy. Just what the enemy were striving to do on our coast, so was he to strive to do on theirs.

Perhaps, after all, such orders were merciful in the end, for in no way could the horrors of war and the vast drain upon the financial resources of Great Britain be carried home to the great mass of the English people so effectively, as by destroying their property, breaking up their commerce, and ruining their trade. You touch a man's pocket, and he responds instantly. It's dollars or pounds, gold or silver, that make war, and that stop it, too.

Save for the supreme test of action with another ship-of-war, after they had been some weeks at sea, the farmers on the *Wasp* counted themselves veterans. All things considered, they had made a fairly quick run across the ocean, having overhauled nothing on the way except a couple of American privateers and a Yankee whaler, but when they had

IN THE WASP'S NEST

arrived off the mouth of the English Channel their luck had changed, and in pursuance of those cruel orders referred to, under which ships of that day went to sea, and under which they practically go to sea to-day, they began their career of methodical destruction.

It had been great fun, so the youngsters in the steerage and the green hands among the crew had thought when they first tried it, to sight a vessel hull down on the distant horizon, to bear away in chase of it, to keep it in sight through a long summer day, gradually overhauling it, in spite of its frantic efforts to escape, and finally to bring it to with a shot across the bow.

Then there would be a hasty examination to ascertain its value, and decide whether it would be best to man it and send it in to be condemned and sold for the benefit of the captors, or to do something else with it. All this was very amusing, but when it came to taking poor, peaceable merchant captains and sailors, confining them in the hold of the *Wasp*, while the prize was either scuttled or burned, that was another thing.

It was not a pleasant duty after all, and they hated it. Yet they did it, since they had to, with a thoroughness which bespoke their efficiency. And there were some bitter memories among the New Englanders, of ravaged sea coasts, of American ships burned and destroyed in the same way, to stir them on. No one enjoyed it at first, yet, because it

“TO SINK, BURN, AND DESTROY!”

had to be done, they went at it grimly, and did it with a conscientious obedience to orders.

Glorious fires the ships made, too—or they would have been glorious if they had not belonged to some poor devil of a prisoner in despair in the hold below—and if it happened to be night-time, as was often the case, before they were ready to apply the torch, the sea was lighted for miles around with the lurid glare of a burning ship. Then the *Wasp* would draw off to a safe distance and wait, like a tiger in his lair, ready to strike any ship of the enemy, which, attracted by the fire—most dangerous and deadliest of all accidents of the sea—would come rushing down, perhaps, thinking to offer assistance, and be taken herself. It was ghastly, beastly, brutal work; but it was war, and it was orders, and it had to be.

That kind of duty sickened little Boston. He was of a fine, generous, high-strung nature, with something very noble in his soul, and he never got used to that phase of war. It was not a duty that any one relished, but it had to be performed in retaliation. The English ships were doing it on the American coasts wherever and whenever they could. It was merely an incident in the terrible game of war. After a while they actually got callous to it. Some of them began to like it, some in the end took actual joy in it; the joy the wanton hunter finds in slaughter, they found in destruction.

Sometimes the ship to be destroyed represented the savings of a man's life-time; sometimes it carried

IN THE WASP'S NEST

everything that her captain owned in the world, and he had nothing to do with, and no interest in, the war. Those weather-beaten old mariners sometimes stood on the deck of the *Wasp* and watched their ships go up in smoke and flame, unable to choke back the unwonted tears that filled their eyes. It was a cruel practice, and by it was borne into the mind of our hero that war means cruelty and unkindness in every way, as well as glory and courage; and that the ruin and the destruction of the guilty and innocent alike follow in its path.

Sometimes, when it seemed proper to the captain, instead of burning the prizes, they scuttled them. That is, they started planks beneath the water-line, or bored holes in the timber, and then stood by and watched the unfortunate vessels sink beneath the waters. It was not so romantic a performance, yet there was a strange, melancholy interest in watching the rapid settling of a once buoyant bark; in hanging expectantly over the rail of the *Wasp*, tossing to and fro in the long swells, waiting for that last shivering plunge which marked the end of a once stanch and gallant vessel.

Sometimes the merchant-ships were armed, and they made a faint show of resistance, which was usually stopped by a well-aimed shot from the *Wasp*. One vessel, after they had taken off its crew and emptied it of its portable contents of value, Captain Blakely made a target of. Under easy canvas the *Wasp* sailed deliberately about her, try-

“TO SINK, BURN, AND DESTROY!”

ing her broadsides from the different positions at good fighting ranges. She was battered to pieces in fifteen minutes! The gun practice was remarkable. Afterward they set fire to her.

Sometimes they chased ships of the enemy which succeeded in escaping from them, and often they overhauled neutral vessels, which, of course, were allowed to go free. Boston always felt a secret joy, which he would not have told to any one for his life, when one of the hunted merchantmen succeeded in getting away. That was not often, however, but it occurred enough times to cause the news of the arrival in the channel of a fast and formidable American sloop-of-war to be circulated everywhere, especially among shipping circles. The rate of insurance was raised at once, and vessels waited for convoys of larger ships, before venturing to leave port. Meanwhile a number of English ships and frigates were sent to the channel with orders to look out for the saucy stranger.

CHAPTER XXV

CLEARING SHIP FOR ACTION

AFTER they had been nearly two months at sea, having destroyed many valuable merchant-ships and privateers of the English, and as provisions and water were running low and supplies getting short, Captain Blakely determined to run into L'Orient, in France, in order to supply his deficiencies in that neutral port. They had been cruising latterly in St. George's Channel, between Ireland and England, with some little success, when they squared to southward to make L'Orient. After they had passed the Land's End, Captain Blakely determined to have another look in the English Channel before he made his harbor, in the hope of falling in with one of the cruisers which, he had learned from one of his prisoners, were on the lookout for him. But he was blown to the westward by strong breezes for several days, to the great disappointment of everyone, which, as it happened, turned out after all to their great advantage.

From the captain down to the smallest powder boy, the whole crew was literally spoiling for a fight. They were tired of chasing traders; they wanted to get alongside a war-ship of the enemy, of a force

CLEARING SHIP FOR ACTION

comparable to their own. On the 28th of June, 1814, in latitude $48^{\circ} 36'$ north, longitude $11^{\circ} 15'$ west, their desire was gratified.

Just at dawn, the lookouts sweeping the seas from the mastheads, reported two sail some distance away, on the lee beam. The hands were turned up at once, and the *Wasp* was headed for the strangers, who were observed making sail in an endeavor to escape. The weather was cloudy, but the breeze was very gentle. The sea was smooth, and the *Wasp* slipped slowly through the water after the two ships, whose character was concealed by the morning haze.

They were both good goers apparently, and seemed to be holding their own with the American ship. Her advantage, if any, was very slight. Blakely, however, held on in chase, and as the morning advanced, he suddenly discovered three more sail to windward of him, on the weather beam, in fact. If they all turned out to be ships-of-war, he would have more than he bargained for on his hands. However, he did not mean to pause before an uncertainty.

If the ships in sight were armed, and one of those to windward, at least, appeared to be a man-of-war, it would, of course, be the part of a prudent commander to attack the windward ships, rather than the leeward ones, for if he engaged the ships to leeward, they could hold him in play while the windward ships ran down upon him. If he bore up and attacked the windward ships he would probably

IN THE WASP'S NEST

have little to fear from the two he had been chasing to leeward.

He grasped the situation with the readiness of a sailor, and as soon as the windward ships were clearly developed he brought the *Wasp* by the wind on the port tack, and bore up for the strangers. The two ships he had been chasing to leeward, evidently merchantmen, kept steadily on their way, doubtless glad to escape from the possibility of capture, which the hot pursuit had threatened. Watching them for a short time, and seeing no sign that they intended to change their course, Blakely determined to dismiss them from further consideration.

Of the vessels to windward, the two furthest away followed his own manœuvres, and hauled their wind on the starboard tack, evidently endeavoring to escape. The third ship, however, which was a large brig, came lasking down upon him, with the wind well aft on her port quarter, with the apparent determination of taking a closer look at him.

The wind was very light, and the two ships neared one another with tantalizing slowness. It was soon perceived on the *Wasp* that the approaching ship was a cruiser of a size nearly equal to their own, and that, as she came down boldly and steadily, nothing would now prevent the long-expected and hoped-for action.

At ten o'clock the brig set English colors and flew a private signal, to which, of course, as the Americans did not understand it, they could make

CLEARING SHIP FOR ACTION

no reply. Thinking to mystify the stranger, and hoping his silence might allure the Englishman, who had the weather-gage and could therefore fight or run, as it pleased him, while the *Wasp*, being to leeward, must, in a certain sense, wait the other man's pleasure, Captain Blakely showed no colors, and paid no attention to the signal, but continued slowly beating up toward the enemy.

The wind had fallen so light that the ships were practically on even keels. On board the *Wasp* things went on just the same as they did on ordinary occasions. The ships approached each other so slowly that Blakely did not even send his men to quarters. Mess call was sounded by the boatswain, the watches were piped to dinner in succession, and the mess gear deliberately put away, before the American captain deemed it necessary to commence his final preparations for action.

Meanwhile the officers and men were in a fever of excitement. Long days of waiting for a ship, the slow, gradual approach of the one before them that morning, the baffling lightness of the wind, all combined to produce a desperate anxiety in everybody's heart. Even the veterans who had seen battle, like little Boston in the steerage, and Billy Bowline in the forecastle, and who made great pretensions of indifference at first, at last gave away to the general feverish desire. Captain Blakely, calmly pacing the quarter-deck, and old Jack Lang, leaning over the hammock cloths in the gangway, alone

IN THE WASP'S NEST

appeared not to be infected by the prevailing excitement.

"Hev patience, Mr. Boston," said the old man, "we'll git it soon enough. That feller means ter tackle us. He hain't changed his course 'cept to foller our motions sence he squared away an' headed fer us. You'll git yer belly full of fightin' afore this sun sets, I'll warrant ye. I know them English, blast 'em!" he cried, shaking his fist in sudden heat. "I've felt their bloody cat on my back. I wants nuthin' better'n to git at 'em; but they'll fight, they're brave, I'll say that fer 'em."

"Yes, they're brave," answered Boston. "I suppose so. But, good heavens, how long it seems! It's past two bells now, and we've been heading toward them ever since six o'clock this morning."

"Mr. Reilly," said the captain, quietly turning to his first lieutenant, "beat to quarters, sir."

Not only was the first lieutenant ready for the signal, but the drummer, since early in the morning, had been hanging about near the mainmast trying to dodge the eye of the captain and impatiently fingering his sticks, until one would have thought he would have worn them through. For the last half-hour he had been standing with his eyes fixed on the first lieutenant, in a perfect agony of impatience, and as the young man turned and looked at him and opened his mouth the youngster, without waiting for the order, madly began to pound on the drum.

Rat-a-tat-tat, rat-a-tat-tat-tat, the grim old call to

CLEARING SHIP FOR ACTION

action, was sent rattling along the decks of the sloop. The first note relieved the tension, and with a wild cheer the men sprang to their stations to clear the ship for action.

With eager hands they tore loose the sea lashings and ran the guns in and loaded them with solid shot for a first smashing blow. Then they were run out, and a turn taken with the training tackles on either side to hold them secure and steady, until the time to use them. Although the sea was so smooth that these precautions were scarcely necessary, yet the invariable routine was nevertheless, as always, scrupulously carried out. Never trust the weather, it's always doing the unexpected, being a sea maxim.

Down in the bowels of the ship the magazine was opened; the gunner and his mates, covered with long brown woollen garments and with list slippers on their feet, were stationed inside a wetted woollen screen which masked the door to the magazine, and minimized the danger of an explosion from sparks or fire. Outside at the hatchways the ship's boys, powder monkeys, they were called, clustered with their black leather passing-boxes, for transporting the powder cartridges, dangling from their shoulders.

The shot-racks were piled with solid shot for the heavy thirty-two pound carronades, with stands of grape and boxes of cannister for close-range work convenient to hand. The arm-chests were broken

IN THE WASP'S NEST

out and opened and every man provided himself with a cutlass and pistol. Following the example of old Lang and some of the other veterans, the men took off their shirts and jackets, kicked off their shoes, drew their belts in a little tighter, and elected to fight thus half-naked. It was a hot, sunny day at best, with no refreshing breeze to temper the summer warmth, and when to the high temperature of the season should be added the heat of battle they would have no use for superfluous clothing. Already perspiration poured from the lean and sinewy bodies of the New Englanders, as it beaded on the brawny arms and mighty chest of the old Hercules of the ship, the chief boatswain's mate. Some of the men bound handkerchiefs about their heads to be handy in case they were needed to tie up a wound.

Those who were detailed to act as first and second boarders put on leather boarding-caps faced with bright steel. Most of the officers, who were armed with cutlass and pistol carefully primed, wore boarding-caps also. Some of them had plates of steel dropping down over their cheeks looking almost like helmets. Rows of sharp pointed pikes were placed in the racks provided for them to be used in repelling boarders.

The mess chests and all other movable stuff that might impede the working of the guns or the free movement of the men were stowed below in the hold out of the way, and the decks were sprinkled with sand so that, when they became slippery, the

CLEARING SHIP FOR ACTION

feet of the men would hold. Division tubs were filled with water and placed conveniently at hand. Pumps were overhauled, tested, and found to be in good working order, and the hose led along the deck to be handy in case of fire.

The carpenter and his mates were provided with shot plugs to stop up any dangerous holes in the ship and were stationed at vital points. The lashings of the boats were secured and looked to, and they were wrapped with heavy canvas to prevent splinters being driven inboard in case they were struck. Heavy rope nettings were made ready to be triced up fore and aft along the waist to hinder and embarrass the enemy in case he sought to board.

Preventer braces were roved from the lower and topsail yard-arms. The masts were stayed by preventer back-stays. The tyes of the heavy topsail yards were re-enforced by chain slings; the principal rigging, including the back-stays, was stoppered, to minimize the danger in case any of it should be shot away. Grappling-irons, huge iron hooks on the end of stout rope, or iron chains, were laid conveniently at hand, to be used in case the ships came in contact, to lash them together.

Around the masts and forward on the forecastle the sail-trimmers, bodies of men whose business it was to look after the manœuvring of the ship, the trimming of the yards, and the manipulation of the sails, were clustered. Some of them were armed with boarding-axes or broad-bladed hatchets to be

IN THE WASP'S NEST

used in cutting away the wreckage of the battle, should it be necessary.

On the quarter-deck the little squad of marines of the ship was drawn up ready to repel boarders by pouring in a shattering fire of musketry, and to endeavor to keep down the small-arm fire of the enemy in the same way. The chief quartermaster and two of the oldest and most experienced hands took their places at the wheel. On the deck below, the relieving tackles, used in moving the tiller and steering the ship in case the wheel were shot away, were overhauled and placed in condition to be of immediate service.

In the tops were little groups of agile, alert topmen, each under the command of a carefully selected midshipman. Their business was to pick off the officers and crew of the enemy by musket-fire. In each top there was a bucket of loaded pistols, and a number of spare muskets. These men aloft were also to look to the spars and the rigging, for which, so far as humanity could be, they were responsible. Their stations were among the most dangerous on the ship for, in addition to the liability of being shot, there was always a possibility that the mast might be shot away, when their chance of escape would be of the very smallest. Little Boston was transferred from the forecastle to the important command of the maintop.

Far below the water-line, in the dark depths of the ship, where it was supposed the expected

CLEARING SHIP FOR ACTION

wounded would be best protected from the enemy's gun-fire, the surgeon and his mates were calmly and phlegmatically arranging the rude surgical appliances of that day upon the operating table. The place was called the cock-pit. The cots with which it was provided were soon to be filled with the wounded. Boston and the other lads on the ship did not like to think of it. They dismissed it from their minds as far as it was possible.

All these various preparations were completed in less time than it takes to tell them, by the practised, well-drilled men. They had done the same thing many times in play, now they were doing it in earnest. The sight of the grim English brig sweeping down upon them warned them it would be different now.

Mr. Reilly, the first lieutenant, stood on the quarter-deck, waiting for the announcements. Presently the several officers reported.

"All ready forward, sir."

"All ready in the waist, sir."

"All ready aft, sir."

"All ready below, sir."

When he had received the reports of all he turned to the quiet captain and informed him that the ship was clear for action, the men at their stations, the guns loaded, and that all was ready for the expected battle.

Meanwhile the stranger, after firing a lee-gun to call attention to another signal which she had set, to

IN THE WASP'S NEST

which, of course, they paid no attention, for Blakely could not make out the English signal, also beat to quarters and made ready to engage. The Americans could hear the faint ruffle of her drum rolling down the wind, giving evidence of their willingness for coming battle.

Before the conflict was joined, however, Blakely determined to try to wrest the weather-gage from the enemy. He suddenly called his men to their stations for stays, and without a word of warning the *Wasp*, which was handled with the precision of a machine, shot up into the wind and fell off on the starboard tack, but before the sheets were hauled home the English ship manœuvred just as smartly and retained her weatherly position. Two or three times Blakely tried to steal this advantage, but the Englishman clung to it with tenacious obstinacy, and his windward position could not be taken away from him.

Seeing the futility of his effort, therefore, Blakely at last abandoned the endeavor, ran off free, brailed up his courses to check the *Wasp's* way, and fired a weather gun in defiance. The challenge was instantly accepted. The English captain, seeing that Blakely had abandoned his effort to get the weather-gage and was now jogging along waiting for him, set more sail to close, and bore down slowly, but as fast as the wind permitted, upon the *Wasp*, which, when she fired her gun, set flying the stars and stripes from every masthead.

CHAPTER XXVI

AN HEROIC ENGLISH CAPTAIN

IN spite of the impatience of the officers and men of both ships, they approached each other with the most exasperating slowness. The *Wasp* had just enough way on her, with her reduced canvas, to give her steerage way, and enable Blakely to retain control of her. The English were just as anxious as the Americans, and every rag of light canvas that the brig could show was spread to urge her on.

It was apparent, even to an unskilled eye, that the *Wasp* was a somewhat larger and heavier vessel than her opponent, the difference between the two in favor of the *Wasp* being about in the ratio of three to two, and it was highly probable that the *Wasp's* battery was correspondingly heavier and more effective than that of the English ship. This disparity made the gallantry of the English captain, in thus boldly leading down upon a superior foe, more conspicuous, and Blakely and his men could not restrain a feeling of pride as they witnessed the courageous advance of the other ship.

The young American captain actually exulted in the daring of his rival, and rejoiced that he was to meet a foeman apparently so worthy of his steel.

IN THE WASP'S NEST

He would have preferred, of course, that the ships should have been of equal size, or that the disparity had been the other way—that is, against him instead of in his favor—but it was quite evident that they would all have enough of fighting before they were through. Indeed, the approaching battle was destined to be one of the hardest of the war, and one of the most desperate actions ever fought on the sea.

Just as the English brig slowly swept within range her captain took in his light sails, and, instead of closing at once, deliberately chose a position, with wise determination, which his successful maintenance of the weather-gage enabled him to do without difficulty, from which he was immune to the fire of the *Wasp*. He checked the way of the brig about sixty yards off the weather quarter of the American ship, and at 3.19 P.M. he opened fire with a shifting twelve-pounder carronade, really a large boat-gun, mounted on his top-gallant forecastle, and so arranged that it could be fired nearly right ahead or on either bow. The shortness of the range, the bulk of the *Wasp*, and the smoothness of the sea, rendered accurate shooting easy. The shot hit the ship fairly and squarely, and sent a shower of splinters inboard.

Not a gun on the *Wasp* as yet bore on the enemy. There was nothing they could do but hold on grimly and take the pounding, especially as they imagined that every moment would bring the brig alongside of them and under their guns. But the English

AN HEROIC ENGLISH CAPTAIN

captain was too good a seaman to throw away such an advantage. For ten minutes, by skilful management of his ship, he held his position, blazing away at the American ship. He was very deliberate about it, too, as the shifting carronade was fired after being carefully aimed only about once in every two minutes.

The Englishman alternated grape-shot and solid shot from the carronade. The damage was considerable. A man was killed by a solid shot, which swept through a port, several were wounded, one severely, by grape-shot, and the situation was becoming desperate. Nothing that a soldier or a sailor is required to do is so hard to compass, and brings such a strain upon his native courage and discipline, as to stand passive under fire without the possibility of a return. In this respect the green crew of the *Wasp* showed that they possessed the steadiness of veterans.

Yet, it was desperately hard work. The younger men could scarcely control their impatience. In the maintop the situation was even more nerve-shattering, for the mizzen topsail hid the enemy from the view of Boston and his men, who were forced to bide quiet, without even the consolation or the relief that comes from seeing what the enemy may be doing. Every few minutes would come that deadly roar, followed by the crash of a solid shot or the whistling of grape. Two discharges, by the way, were aimed at the rigging of the *Wasp*, and several holes were torn in the maintopsail by the grape-shot all about their heads. Down in the waist Boston

IN THE WASP'S NEST

could see old Jack, watching anxiously after every discharge to see if he were hurt. He waved his hand at the old man, therefore, and the mutual recognition cheered them both.

Seeing that the English commander was too good a seaman to throw away his advantage, Blakely at last put his helm down and made a half-board. The *Wasp* slowly swept to port. At 3.26 the after carronade in the port battery at last bore upon the English ship. The gun captain was immediately beneath Captain Blakely. The lock-string was taut in his hand. Without orders, he trained the gun on the brig's bow as the ship swung, and then stood looking at Blakely with a world of entreaty in his gaze. The captain was no less desirous than the gunner. The instant the piece bore he nodded his head.

"Give it to him, lads!" he cried, but before the words were heard the hammer of the gun-lock fell upon the priming, and with a huge roar the bolt sped to its mark. The sound had not died away before the next carronade barked out its note of defiance followed by the next, and the next in succession, until the whole broadside had been deliberately emptied upon the English ship.

The reply came instantly. Seeing that he could no longer maintain his position, the captain of the brig laid his ship alongside the *Wasp* and returned her fire with every gun. The fire on both sides was exceedingly rapid. The marksmen of the American

AN HEROIC ENGLISH CAPTAIN

were in their element. The tension of waiting taken off, they put in practice all they had learned in the various drills and target practices they had enjoyed, and while they maintained their fire at a fearful pace they did not sacrifice accuracy to haste.

The concussion, of course, deadened the light air, and the two vessels lay side by side in the smooth water, less than twenty yards apart, not so far as is the distance from sidewalk to sidewalk in an ordinary city street! The smoke hung over each of them in heavy clouds, but it was easy for the American gunners to find the target. From the marines on the quarter-deck and the small-arm men in the top a rapid musket-fire was also poured upon the English, although without much effect, for the smoke would scarcely permit any individual officer or man to be seen.

After a few minutes of this close action the punishment inflicted upon him by the heavy guns of the *Wasp* convinced the English captain that he could no longer play at that game. He was too weak for this sort of fighting. Close quarters was his only hope. He had trusted to be able to overcome his disparity in size by superior seamanship and the accuracy and rapidity of his fire. His crew was a famous one. They had been called the pride of Plymouth. They had been together a long time, and had been drilled and practised under their present captain until they worked together with absolute

IN THE WASP'S NEST

accuracy. But he met a captain just as skilled, a crew just as well drilled, marksmen just as accurate, nay, even more so than his own, and after ten minutes of fearful punishment he was convinced that the battle was lost unless he could capture his enemy, as so many British captains had done in similar instance, by resorting to the final and desperate expedient of boarding.

Bidding his boarders to stand by, he put his helm hard aweather, and, covered by the smoke, ran down upon the *Wasp*. He struck her lightly upon the port quarter with his starboard bow. With that unconscious prescience which distinguishes the true sailor, Blakely had divined his movement. As the bow of the brig came shoving through the smoke, he raked her hard at close range, and then he called away his men to repel boarders.

The American seamen, cutlass and pike in hand, came running aft and crouched down beneath the bulwarks. The marines, with loaded muskets and bayonets, rallied at once to the point of impact. The English captain had been wounded early in the action. A bullet had torn away the calves of both his legs. He had refused to leave the deck, and had continued to direct the fire in spite of his wounds. Just as the two ships came together a grape-shot wounded him in both thighs so severely that he fell on his knees. He was bleeding fearfully. His resolution, however, was not abated by these four severe wounds, and, kneeling there upon the deck, support-

AN HEROIC ENGLISH CAPTAIN

ing himself by a stay, he gave the command to board.

The English sea-dogs, with magnificent courage, sprang upon the rail of their ship. The two ships were in actual contact, but the bend of the sides and the light tumble home of the upper works separated the two crews by a few feet. They were near enough to each other, however, to fight hand in hand.

The British fired their pistols in the faces of the Americans. The marines responded with their muskets. Then the two parties went at it, cutlass and pike in hand, Jack Lang in the very front of the fray. The roar of the great guns was succeeded by the crackle of the small arms, muskets, and pistols, and the shouts and yells of the madly excited men.

Though the English fought with desperate resolution, the cool courage with which they were met, and the preponderance of force on the American decks finally drove them back. They were not yet beaten, however, for the English captain, seeing the repulse of his boarders, dragged himself to his feet, grasped one of the shrouds, swung himself on the hammock cloth, and called his men to board again.

The men in the main-top of the *Wasp* now had a clear view of the English officers and men.

"The English captain!" suddenly cried little Boston, comprehending the struggling masses as the smoke blew away. "Mark him down!"

Three or four shots rang out as the topmen tried

IN THE WASP'S NEST

their pieces on him. Still the English captain remained unharmed. His men crowded a second time to the rail, and the battle began again. In the top was a Vermonter who was noted for his skill as a marksman. Taking careful aim, he sent a bullet crashing into the head of the brave English officer, and at the same moment another bullet from the deck found the same mark. They could see him drop his sword, and clap his hands to his face. They were close enough to see his lips move as he fell back upon the deck, dead.

At this opportune moment for the Americans the stentorian voice of Blakely could be heard calling :
“ Boarders, away ! ”

CHAPTER XXVII

TAKEN BY STORM

"THIS way, men," cried Boston, who was not a boarder of course, but he was so excited by the combat that he swung himself down on the main-yard and, followed by two or three of his men, ran out on the yard-arm, slid down the standing part of the main brace, which had been cut by a shot and was trailing on the deck of the enemy, gained the forecastle of the brig, and plunged into the backs of the Englishmen, who, notwithstanding that they had lost their captain and almost every officer of the ship, were manfully standing up against the American boarders led by Blakely himself, with Lang plying his cutlass with terrible effect close by his captain's side.

There was a wild *mêlée* lasting scarcely more than an instant, before the English left alive were simply overborne by force of numbers. They were driven back against the rails, masts, and bulwarks, and their weapons literally wrested from them. At 3.44 the brig was surrendered by the captain's clerk, the senior surviving officer on the ship!

"Who are you, sir?" asked Blakely, as the man tendered his sword.

IN THE WASP'S NEST

"Richard Collins, sir."

"Your rank?"

"Captain's clerk."

"Where is your captain?"

"Dead, sir, yonder."

"The first lieutenant?"

"Wounded, sir."

"Your purser, bo's'n, midshipmen — any sea officer?"

"All killed or wounded, sir," said the man, brokenly.

"Young man, keep your sword," said Blakely, returning the weapon, "you have made an heroic defence. In all my experience I have never seen such fighting. What ship is this?"

"His Britannic Majesty's brig *Reindeer*, sir."

"What's your force?"

"One hundred and eighteen men."

"Your armament?"

"Sixteen short twenty-four-pound carronades, two short sixes, and a shifting twelve-pounder on the forecastle. May I ask the name of your ship, sir?"

"The United States sloop-of-war *Wasp*," answered Blakely.

"We thought so," said the man. "We were ordered to look out for you."

After returning his sword to Mr. Collins, Blakely walked over to the body of the English captain. As he stopped near him he took off his hat and looked respectfully and pityingly down at him.

TAKEN BY STORM

"Gentlemen," he said to his own officers who were near him, "there was a hero if there ever was one."

"Yes, yer honor," said the boatswain's mate of the English ship who stood near, "I was by 'im all the time of the fightin'. You notice 'e 'ad both calves of 'is legs shot off, an' a bullet went through both thighs. Why, sirs, w'en we was beat back from the fust attempt to board, he raised 'imself to 'is feet by ketchin' onto a stay an' was standin' on the rail cheerin' us on w'en that second bullet comin' from aloft struck 'im in the 'ead. 'My God!' 'e says, puttin' his 'ands to 'is face an' droppin' 'is sword, an' then 'e falls to the deck where ye sees 'im."

"What was his name?"

"Manners, sir. Cap'n William Manners."

"Take his body aft, some of you," said Blakely; "lay him on an arm-chest on the quarter-deck, and cover him with his own flag. He bore a name his countrymen will long remember. He did all that mortal man could do to win a victory and was only beaten by a larger and heavier ship."

Two or three Englishmen and a number of American sailors picked up the body of the heroic captain and carried it tenderly aft to the quarter-deck of the *Reindeer*, all the Americans uncovering as the little group passed them.

"Do you know who shot him, Mr. Boston? You were in the main-top," asked the captain of the *Wasp* of the midshipman who stood near.

IN THE WASP'S NEST

"Skyles, sir, the Vermont hunter."

"Where is he?"

"Why—he was here when we boarded. He followed us. I don't know where he is, sir," answered Ned, looking around in surprise.

"Please, yer 'onor," said a wounded English sailor, leaning on his elbow on the deck, "I seed 'im shoot my cap'n an' I pistoled 'im as 'e dropped on our deck from the yard-arm. 'Is body lies yonder."

Blakely stooped down and turned the body indicated by the English seaman over on its back, and there was the tall Vermonter. A bullet had struck him in the heart. He held his cutlass clasped tightly in his hand. The look of fierce excitement of the battle had given place to one of peace, now that his earthly career was ended.

"Mr. Boston," said Blakely, "you have done well in this battle. You have done exceptionally well where all deserve to be commended, and I am heartily pleased with you and your gallantry in boarding the *Reindeer* from the main yard-arm. You will be mentioned in the despatches, sir, and your father, old Commodore Little, will be proud of you, I am sure. It was a fortunate day, sir, when we picked you up out of the sea."

Captain Blakely turned and made his way aft, followed by the little midshipman, who was so excited that he could scarcely contain himself. After they had gone a few steps they came across old Jack Lang, whose naked chest was grimed with

TAKEN BY STORM

sweat and powder stains. He was holding a cutlass splashed with blood, not his own. He had the reeking weapon folded in his arms, that little trick of position he had, but as his eye fell upon little Boston, whom he had marked when they had boarded and striven to reach, and as his ear drank in the captain's words of praise, forgetful of everything but his love for the boy and the strange relationship which he sustained to him, he dropped the weapon and fairly caught him in his arms.

"Yer honor," he cried, in enthusiastic admiration. "I done it! I made this boy, this young gentleman, wot he is. It's a proud day for me, sir, w'en I hears ye commendin' him fer courage an' skill, but I knowed it 'ud be so. Me an' Cap'n Little, sir, we allus said he'd be an admiral afore he died."

"Indeed, Master Lang, your pupil does you great honor."

"Thankee, sir, thankee," said the old man, as much delighted as if he had received the captain's praise himself. "Bein' a man of few words, sir, as yer honor knows of me fer a long time back," he continued, his eyes twinkling, "I makes bold in behalf of the crew, w'ich they ain't haymakers no more, as has done so well, to congratulate yer honor on this most amazin' victory. In all my fightin', I skurcely never seed nuthin' like it! It reminds me of the day we fit the *Serrypis* more'n forty years ago. I tell ye, sir, we was led by a fighter them days, an' I

IN THE WASP'S NEST

don't keer who knows it, we're led by a fighter now."

"Thank you, Lang, thank you," said the captain, his face mantling from this praise.

He was too good an officer not to value the good esteem of his crew, and the approbation of such a veteran as Lang, who had fought in so many battles, under so many great captains, was as high a tribute as he could receive.

"Sir," went on the old man, "I hates them English! Curse 'em, I lives to fight 'em! They've left their mark on my back with their nasty cat too many times fer me to ever forgit 'em. But that man lyin' yonder, sir," he cried, pointing toward the body of the English captain upon the deck, whose determined conduct shed much immortal lustre upon his service and his flag, "that man was one of the bravest men I ever fit against, an' he was a prime seaman, too, he was. Pity he couldn't 'a' been an American."

"You're right, you're right," said Blakely. "His loss saddens our triumph. But let's go aboard the *Wasp* and take account of our injuries. Mr. Boston, tell Lieutenant Tillinghast to take charge of the prize with the crews of the first and second cutters. You may remain with him."

The result of this sanguinary action was a list of casualties appalling in number and character. Twenty-five officers and men had been killed, and forty-two wounded, most of them severely, making a total

TAKEN BY STORM

of sixty-seven out of one hundred and eighteen men on the *Reindeer*. The brig itself had been literally cut to pieces. The American gun fire had been aimed largely at the British guns, and the ports were knocked into one continuous opening. Everything on deck had been swept away. Both masts had been badly wounded, the head booms frightfully cut up. The brig had received many shot between wind and water. Many of the crew had been killed by pike or bayonet thrusts, or by blows from the cutlasses, showing how close had been the hand-to-hand fighting.

On board the *Wasp* the casualties were also severe, greater loss having been inflicted by the English upon the American ship in this fight than in any of the other sloop, or even frigate, actions, save in the capture of the *Chesapeake*. Eleven officers and men were killed outright, or mortally wounded, and fifteen others severely wounded.

Midshipman Toscan, in the mizzen top of the *Wasp*, had been mortally wounded by a grape-shot. Midshipman Langdon was stationed in the foretop. When the *Reindeer* ran aboard the American ship he had emulated the manœuvre of Ned Boston and had come down on the foreyard with his men, settling themselves there to sweep the enemy's decks with musketry. While there a bullet struck and mortally wounded him. He refused to be lowered to the deck, but, supporting himself by tenaciously grasping the jack-stay, he stayed there and clung to

IN THE WASP'S NEST

the yard until the battle was over, urging his men to keep cool and aim carefully.

Aside from the losses in men, most of which had resulted from the hand-to-hand fight upon the decks, the *Wasp* had not sustained much damage from the British fire. There was a twenty-four-pound shot through the foremast, and five heavy shot had hulled the American sloop, and she had been well peppered with grape, but otherwise no particular, or serious, damage had resulted from the combat. As soon as their own men had been attended to, the surgeon and his mates had repaired to the *Reindeer*, where they did all they could for the unfortunate Englishmen. The dead were all buried that afternoon. Every possible honor was paid to the heroic English captain, who had written his name high in the immortal records of the masters of the sea.

The next day the foremast of the *Reindeer* carried away, and she was so badly shattered that Blakely, finding it impossible to bring her in, set fire to her and blew her up. It was a melancholy picture indeed which she presented from the decks of the *Wasp*, and one that filled them all with sadness as they looked upon the last of her.

After taking two more prizes, which they scuttled as they had done the others, Blakely overhauled a third, which he turned into a cartel. Putting the wounded English prisoners aboard of her, he finally abandoned the channel and bore up for L'Orient, which he reached on the 8th of July, having been

TAKEN BY STORM

out three months, during which time he had inflicted losses upon the commerce of the enemy, amounting perhaps to a million dollars, and had destroyed one of the finest little war-ships in the British service.

He was much in need of water and supplies, and his magazines needed replenishing. His haymakers, too, if this opprobrious title, from the sailor's point of view, could be applied to so splendid a set of seamen and fighters as they had developed into, were sick for a sight of a shore, so that everything urged him to take the course that he did.

Next to the *Constitution*, his ship had become the most famous of American cruisers. People spoke of her as the "Terror of the Sea," and a hideous but popular cartoon depicted "John Bull" as suffering excruciating torments from the stings of the *Wasp*. Determined upon giving his men a long rest and thoroughly overhauling the *Wasp*, therefore, Blakely dropped anchor in the famous harbor from which so many years before Paul Jones had led his nondescript fleet in that famous cruise which ended in the capture of the *Serapis* and the sinking of the *Richard*, a story of heroic and desperate valor which the youngsters on the ship never tired of hearing from the lips of old Lang, who, to be sure, never tired of telling it, either.

It was a great relief to everyone when the cable rushed through the hawse-pipe, and the first part of the cruise was over. The officers, as they could be spared from their duties, got plenty of shore leave,

IN THE WASP'S NEST

and by the special favor of the captain Boston went with him for a visit to Paris, which was the event, so far, of his lifetime.

Filling up their complement with some exchanged privateersmen to take the place of those who had been killed in action or were so seriously wounded that they had not recovered when the date of sailing arrived, and had to be left behind, after having completely overhauled the *Wasp*, corrected some defects which the first cruise discovered, they set sail on the 27th of August, 1814, with light hearts, fond anticipations, and bright hopes, on another cruise, which, they trusted, might prove as successful as their first cruise, and dashed into the British Channel.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A *WASP* INDEED

ONCE more off the English Channel.

As Midshipman Geisinger said, the English Channel was the toll-road and the *Wasp* was the gate-keeper. The extraordinary luck which had attended them did not desert them, and after being out three days they overhauled the brig *Lettice*, loaded with grain, and scuttled and sent her to the bottom as usual. The next day, again after a stern chase, they meted out the same treatment to the brig *Bon Accord*, loaded with Spanish wine. On the morning of the first of September, the day after, they found themselves in the presence of a large convoy of merchantmen, of some twelve sail, under the protection of the line-of-battle ship *Armada*, of seventy-four guns.

The convoy, which was going free with the wind on the port quarter, was sighted at daybreak. Indeed, Blakely, being of a curious and investigating turn of mind, had run so close to it during the night that at dawn he was almost under the guns of the great ship which brought up the rear of the long, straggling line of merchantmen. As soon as it was light enough to see the perilous position of the *Wasp*,

IN THE WASP'S NEST

he instantly bore up and began to beat away from the towering liner.

The first business of the Americans was to get out of range at once. The wind was light, and it was soon found that the huge, lumbering capital ship was no match at all in speed for the handy little sloop-of-war in such a breeze. So Blakely boldly wore ship and hovered near the liner again.

The liner, at first, beyond signalling her convoy and shooting to windward of the rearmost ships, paid no attention to the American, but after Blakely had made one or two bold dashes at the line the *Armada* signalled the merchantmen to bear away, and determinedly headed up after the impudent little ship to drive her away finally.

Realizing that he could easily outsail his pursuer, who, indeed, would not dare to follow him very far from the vicinity of her convoy, Blakely determined upon an act of extraordinary boldness. In other words, he resolved to cut out a prize under the very nose of the British captain and the huge ship-of-the-line. Sending his men to quarters, he briefly addressed them and communicated his purpose. His dashing young fire-eaters were ready for anything. Receiving his announcement with wild cheers, they instantly began to busy themselves in preparing for the audacious exploit.

The convoy, which, like all other convoys, obeyed signals about as it pleased the different skippers, was strung out in a long line, the battleship near the

A WASP INDEED

rear of the line, most of the merchant ships being to leeward of her, although the foremost ship was well to windward and manifested a foolish determination to stay there.

Blakely headed away from the line on the port tack, and the *Armada* came jogging along in his rear. A few moments served to show the relative sailing qualities of the two ships. The *Wasp* could sail all around the other in that wind; in a gale it might be different. Blakely kept her apparently jammed up to windward, but he cleverly allowed her to go to leeward as fast as he dared.

The unsuspecting English captain, following hard upon her heels, gradually left his convoy further and further astern, and began to weather the American ship perceptibly, to his very great delight. He hoped to get abeam of her, and then have her in his mercy, if she were in range. In his anger at the audacity of the chase, the impudence of the *Wasp's* performance, the Englishman failed to take account of the position and actions of his following. Seeing him, as they supposed, chasing the stranger away, they one after another braced in aft and bore up to get on their course again.

Although Blakely had explained his purpose of not leaving the convoy without an attempt at least to cut out one of them, his men could scarcely understand his manœuvre in persistently leading the line-of-battle ship away from the fleet. They were a puzzled lot of youngsters, and an anxious lot as

IN THE WASP'S NEST

well. Now that their captain had declared his intention to attempt the brilliant exploit, they were keenly disappointed when they saw the opportunity, as it appeared, slowly fading away. But Blakely knew exactly what he was about. He held on as long as he could, for, as every moment separated the *Armada* farther and farther from the merchant ships, he feared she would give over the chase. But the English captain was determined to hold on till he settled things and had driven away the saucy Yankee which had been bothering him all morning.

The American captain counted on getting the Englishman so far from the vessels he was to protect that the superior speed and handiness of the *Wasp* would enable him to overhaul one of them, at least, before the unwieldy ship-of-the-line could overtake her. Therefore, having led the English captain as far away as he dared, Blakely suddenly put his helm up, shivered his after sails, braced in, and ran off down the wind, toward the head of the convoy, like a scared rabbit. The surprised liner emulated his manœuvre by wearing and following after, losing much distance in the performance.

However, Blakely was now well ahead and far out of gunshot range on the Englishman's star-board bow and leaving him every moment. All the *Wasp's* stunsails and every other cloth of canvas that she could spread he at once flung out. Preparation had been made before he shifted his helm,

A WASP INDEED

and no time whatever was lost in getting the stunsails on the sloop. Aided by them the *Wasp* skimmed over the waves like a huge bird. The captain of the *Armada* had anticipated no such bold manœuvre as this, and before he could get his stunsails out the fast little American sloop-of-war had drawn so far away that it was evident that he could not catch her in time.

Meantime there was a scene of wild excitement in the convoy. In helpless confusion some wore and tried to beat back to the *Armada*. Others ran off before the wind, but the van ship kept boldly on—indeed, there was nothing else to do—hoping that her distance might save her, or, as she was armed, that she might make so stout a resistance as would give the *Armada* time to catch up. The English captain was frantic with rage as he saw the audacious little American approaching the lone ship at the head of his line.

Finding that he was so decidedly outsailed, as a last desperate chance he luffed up and cut loose his heavy broadside, scaling his main-deck ports as the sea permitted and using his heaviest charges in his largest guns. For one anxious moment the Americans fancied they might be yet within range. The men on the little cruiser held their breath, fearfully expectant that a long and lucky shot from the big Britisher might cripple them by carrying away a spar, but the broadside that was hurled upon them fortunately did no damage. Seeing the uselessness

IN THE WASP'S NEST

of the attempt the *Armada* ran off again and doggedly settled down to pursue. Casting a quick glance aloft and finding that he was safe, Blakely held the *Wasp* steadily on her course toward the head of the convoy, a large brig very deep in the water and a sluggish sailer.

The chase was making frantic efforts to escape, but the *Wasp* ran her down after a chase of an hour, and fired a shot over her, which she pluckily returned by a discharge from the two small guns that she carried. Blakely peremptorily ordered her to strike her flag at once as he ranged alongside. Upon her refusal to do so and upon her persistence in blazing away at him a second time, certainly in the hope of crippling him so that he would fall into the clutches of the liner pounding furiously away in chase, Blakely fired a broadside into the brig which dismounted her two guns, carried away her mainmast and foretopmast, and left her helpless.

Sending the first cutter with Mr. Baurý and Ned Boston and a heavily armed boat crew aboard of her, with instructions to destroy her without losing a moment, Blakely hove-to the *Wasp*, and coolly waited, giving the nearest merchantman astern a damaging broadside as he did so from his weather battery.

The cutter's men in their excitement pulled like mad as they left the side of the *Wasp*, and the heavy boat fairly danced through the water in racing time toward the helpless prize. They scrambled

A WASP INDEED

aboard of her at once, meeting no resistance from the terrified English crew of ten men, whom they clapped into the only one of their own boats still left seaworthy and sent drifting away, to be picked up by the liner of course. The prize they had captured proved to be the brig *Mary*, loaded with a very valuable cargo of new brass cannon, small arms, and other munition of war.

The carpenter, who was in the cutter, hurried below and bored two or three holes in the ship's hull, while the rest of the crew scattered in every direction the combustibles with which they had been provided. When they applied the torch, so rapidly did the brig take fire, that the carpenter was almost cut off below. In an incredibly short time the prize was a roaring furnace.

Waiting until they made sure that she would be thoroughly destroyed, they scrambled down into their boat and pulled away to the *Wasp*. Blakely was standing on the weather quarter, waiting in the greatest anxiety for them. The breeze had freshened somewhat and the *Armada*, having at last got a better wind, was rushing down upon them.

The English captain was furious with anger and would have given anything to catch the American burning his most valuable ship before his eyes. Indeed, the liner was within long gunshot range now with her heavy guns, and but that she would have been forced to bring to or to yaw in order that her broadside might bear, in which case she would have

IN THE WASP'S NEST

lost valuable distance, the *Wasp* would already have been under fire. Therefore there was need for haste.

Without stopping to unload her crew the falls of the cutter were hooked on, and with everything in her she was run up to the davits, all standing. The men on the *Wasp* never worked so hard in their lives before, nor so quickly as they did at that moment. As soon as the falls were belayed the braces were manned, the yards swung, and the little sloop rushed away with the wind on her port quarter. Seeing which the line-of-battle ship, whose captain was simply foaming with fury at the impudence of the Americans, put her helm up also, and as her long broadside swung in view she let fly with every gun that bore.

One shot carried away the topmast stuns'l boom, another smashed one of the boats at the davits. Here and there a rope or a shroud was parted, the lee cross-jack brace was shot away, there was a huge rent in the mainsail, but nothing serious happened.

In desperation the *Armada* wore, and as her other broadside bore she turned it loose upon the *Wasp* also, but with no effect whatever. They were out of range. Then seeing the futility of further effort she sullenly ran down toward the brig's boat and picked up her unfortunate crew. The brig by this time was a mass of flame. She was so very low in the water, too, that if she had not burned she would have certainly sunk from the holes they had made

A WASP INDEED

in her. As the Americans watched her, however, some of the powder with which she was stored ignited, and she blew up with a roar that was heard for miles.

As for the *Wasp's* men, when they realized the brilliancy of their bold and audacious exploit, they broke into frantic cheers, dancing and yelling, hugging each other upon the deck, and shaking their fists at the impotent liner in such a fashion that Blakely almost conceived that the English could hear the noise and commotion.

It was one of the most daring exploits of the war. The cruise had opened most auspiciously and everybody was in the best of spirits and the highest humor. There was more in store for them that day if they only knew it.

CHAPTER XXIX

RIGHT INTO THE FACE OF THE ENEMY

AFTER their splendid exploit the crew in high glee secured the guns and went to a well-earned dinner, of which they partook with the zest of men who had done their duty and had worked hard in doing it. The breeze freshened hour by hour, and in consideration of this fact, which, of course, diminished the difference in the rate of sailing between the liner and the *Wasp*, Blakely concluded that he had done about all the damage to the convoy that he was capable of under the circumstances, and he continued out to sea with the wind on the quarter, the gallant little sloop making great way through the water.

As they were still within the most frequented waters on the globe, for nearly all the shipping trade of the world at one time or another passed through the English Channel, the lookouts, which were kept constantly on every masthead during the day, were eagerly sweeping the horizon in every direction. There was a standing reward of a half-eagle for every sail sighted, which was doubled in case the vessel sighted were an enemy, and the purser had been heard to say that if their luck did not change

INTO THE FACE OF THE ENEMY

the crew would bankrupt the United States! Scarcely a day passed without their overhauling some vessel, or attempting to do so, and the captures were many.

With a veteran crew there would have been some grumbling on account of the lack of prize money, for Blakely was unable to send in any of the ships he captured. He could not spare the men in the first place, the distance was too great from a home port in the second, and it was scarcely worth while to run the almost certain risk of recapture from the British vessels which in the latter part of 1814 literally swarmed off the American coast, blockading every harbor as they were able in the most rigid way. Indeed, it meant salvation for the British merchant marine to enforce such a blockade, for the cruises of the *Wasp* were vivid examples of the damage that might be, and would be, produced if the American ships were allowed to get free.

The presence of that one little American vessel in the channel, not only by captures which she made, but by the ships which the fear of her detained in their harbors, the men who were forced to lie idle, the demurrage charges run up, to say nothing of the increased cost of insurance and valuable time lost by the necessity for holding merchant ships until they could be convoyed by war vessels, which, as in the case of the *Armada*, were not always equal to the task assigned them, had inflicted a monetary loss which it was scarcely possible to estimate.

IN THE WASP'S NEST

Blakely had sent his report of the first part of his cruise home from L'Orient, and, though he had not received word, Congress had immediately voted him a gold medal for the destruction of the *Reindeer*, and silver medals to the officers, and, as usual, \$25,000 in prize money to distribute among the officers and crew to compensate them for the enforced destruction of their enemy. The State of North Carolina, which claimed him as a son, had also voted him a magnificent sword. Of all these things, however, the *Wasp's* people knew nothing.

In Blakely's report Midshipman Boston, with other young officers, was commended for conspicuous gallantry. Blakely had considerably called the youngster into the cabin and read to him that portion of his letter to the Secretary of the Navy to which reference had been made, and the boy was treading on air.

"You have no name of your own, Mr. Boston," said Blakely at the time; "at least no one has ever been able to find out what it is, but you are making the name which was given you, the name of that stout old New England city which you bear, one of the most noted among those of our young officers of the navy. I don't know, sir, but that it is better to make a name, after all, than to be born with one."

"Yes, sir," answered Boston. "But it's very nice to be born with one. At least, I think it would be,

INTO THE FACE OF THE ENEMY

sir. Do you suppose I'll ever find anything out about my—my—father, Captain Blakely?"

"I'm afraid not, sir," answered the captain, "yet such things have happened," he added, seeing the boy's disappointed look. "The secret began on the sea, you know; perhaps it may be solved there."

"I hope so, sir," answered Ned. "Commodore Little gave me the locket and ring when I entered the navy. He said perhaps I might need them sometime—that they might make me known."

"What have you done with them?"

"I always wear them around my neck on this little chain."

"That's right, that's right. Never be parted from them on any account; and who knows what may occur? Now run along on deck and say nothing about my mention of your name in the despatches to any one. A good officer, sir, is always modest and discreet."

"Ay, ay, sir. Thank you, sir," responded the delighted boy.

"Not at all," answered the captain, "not at all. You earned it."

But to return to the most eventful day in the life of the ship. About six o'clock in the evening four sail were sighted in quick succession. Two of them were together, far away on the lee bow, and two of them were to windward in line ahead. True to the sound principles which had actuated him before, Blakely immediately hauled up in chase of the near-

IN THE WASP'S NEST

est weathermost vessel. The ten-knot breeze was a fine working one for the *Wasp*. She showed her sailing qualities in regal style, making great speed through the troublesome little sea kicking up through the fresh breeze.

The two ships to leeward were so far away that, although they appeared to be coming by the wind in an endeavor to beat up toward the American ship, Blakely disregarded them for the present. Of the two ships to windward, one was far ahead of the other. In fact, the van ship was so far away from the second that she was quite hull down from the *Wasp*, and although she wore just before nightfall, and bore down to investigate what was about to happen, it would be some time, so the Americans calculated, before she could draw near enough to do any damage.

The ship which he had singled out and toward which he was steadily approaching by brilliant windward work in long and short tacks, in alternation, after some hesitation concluded to run down toward her consort far ahead. The action of these four ships indicated that they were men-of-war, for merchant ships would have immediately made sail to get away from the proximity of what, from her actions, was undoubtedly an enemy.

Blakely, therefore, was taking his ship into a circle of war vessels, any one of which might be more than a match for his own. It was a hazardous undertaking, but he did not enter upon it recklessly. On

INTO THE FACE OF THE ENEMY

the contrary, he carefully weighed every possibility. It appeared to him that under the present conditions, if the wind held, and it was blowing with encouraging steadiness, he could bring the vessel he was directly chasing under his guns in a couple of hours. He was sure that by no possibility could the two vessels to leeward get in range before four or five hours. It was possible, however, that the vessel ahead might succeed in bringing him to action about the same time that he overhauled the chase. He considered the matter with the utmost skill, estimated the distance between himself and the other ships as best he could, and finally called to his aid not only his lieutenants, but also old Jack Lang, whose long sea experience enabled him to give valuable counsel under such circumstances.

They finally concluded that they would, in all probability, get alongside the first vessel with forty minutes or an hour to spare before the second came down. Of course if the three vessels came together at the same time, as it was quite evident now that either of the two to windward was a fair match for the *Wasp*, the two combined would so greatly overmatch him that he could hardly fight them with much chance of success. But if he could have half an hour to deal with the one before the other came up Blakely and the others also felt confident that they could put her out of action and be ready for the second when she appeared.

It may be doubted, however, such was the tem-

IN THE WASP'S NEST

per of the officers and men and such their confidence in the ship, whether Blakely would have turned back if he had been certain of meeting the two ships at the same moment. But as it was he had just the chances that have been mentioned.

The *Wasp* was the scene of the wildest enthusiasm. The sailors could see the situation as well as the officers. They realized that Blakely was boldly heading into a converging circle of enemies, with the determination of attacking them in detail with his single ship. It was a conception infinitely more audacious and attended with much more risk than had been their notable exploit of the morning. Perhaps under the spell of that early success, they approached it with that sublime self-confidence by which battles are half won in advance.

The men were sent to supper at the usual time, and constrained to eat, in spite of their engrossing situation, by the insistence of Lang and the veteran petty officers, but it was difficult to keep them below for any length of time. After supper was over, the ship cleared for action as usual.

The wind blew from such a direction that the best method of approach for the *Wasp* continued to be by long and short tacks in alternation. Never was a ship handled more smartly, and Blakely's heart filled with pride and pleasure as he saw the *Wasp* again and again shoot up into the wind and fall away on the other tack with scarcely an appreciable loss of speed. The cool, seamanlike, hand-

INTO THE FACE OF THE ENEMY

some way in which the evolutions were performed filled him with joy in his men and his ship.

The night bade fair to be very dark. There was no moon, although the stars shone brightly. Before darkness came on, the *Wasp* had drawn nearly in range of the chase, which seemed to be a sluggish vessel indeed. Before it became too dark to see, the captain himself had gone to the cross-trees and had taken a long look at the other three ships of the enemy, which, being nearer now, could yet be discerned even in the twilight. The position they had reached justified his reckoning. They were just about where he thought they would be. The one that had been forward was of course nearest to the *Wasp* and her chase, but he noted with grim pleasure that he could count on at least thirty minutes alone with the flying brig ahead of him. That would be all that he wanted.

Meanwhile, by the cleverest kind of sea-jockeying, by the superior speed and handiness of his ship, she had got into such a position that she had finally gained the weather-gauge of the chase! Indeed, seeing the state of affairs and the superior speed of his ship, he had held on his last tack, until he could run off free and come down to windward of her. The men had been sent to quarters and every preparation made for battle, when about nine o'clock at night he drew so near to the port quarter of the brig that he concluded to hail her:

CHAPTER XXX

THE *WASP* SINKS THE *AVON*

CAPTAIN BLAKELY sprang on the mizzen sheer poles to hail, but before he had opened his mouth a voice from the brig called out :

“What ship is that?”

Instead of giving the desired information, Blakely hollowed his hand and shouted back :

“What brig is that?”

“His Britannic Majesty’s Brig *Avon*,” was the answer, but the noise made by the strong wind singing through the rigging prevented the American from catching the name. Again the chase hailed.

“What ship is that?”

“Heave to!” yelled Blakely through the trumpet which the sailing-master handed to him. “And we’ll soon let you know who we are!”

But his words were not understood apparently, for the question was again repeated. At that Blakely directed Sailing-Master Carr to go forward on the forecastle, which would bring him considerably nearer the brig, and order her to heave to or he would sink her.

The course of the brig had been one of singular

THE *WASP* SINKS THE *AVON*

vacillation. She had first started to escape in one direction, then she had endeavored to join her consort, then she had come by the wind as if to wait for her antagonist. Now the captain evidently intended another change. The *Wasp* would have been certain to overhaul her sooner or later, but if she had continued to windward the *Avon* would have run off before the wind and it might have been later. At any rate, when the final demand was made from the *Wasp*, instead of complying, the English captain suddenly set his port foretopmast stunsail, which was a risky thing to do in the high wind then blowing.

The famous twelve-pound carronade which had done such damage to the *Wasp* at the beginning of her action with the *Reindeer* had been taken out of the latter ship before she was destroyed and mounted on the forecastle as a shifting gun. Seeing the effort of the chase to escape, Blakely at 9.22 opened fire from this carronade, which was mounted as a chase-gun and had a range practically dead ahead. The brig instantly returned the fire from her after-guns. Then she put her helm up to run before the wind.

In order to frustrate this attempt to escape, Blakely also put his helm up to bear under her lee. As the *Wasp* was much quicker than the other vessel she fell off more rapidly, and as her broadside bore she poured a close-range raking fire into the enemy. The American captain had loaded his guns with

IN THE WASP'S NEST

star, bar, and chain shot, and, contrary to his ordinary practice, had directed the gun-captains to aim at the rigging of the chase.

His wisdom was apparent. The brig's spanker-gaff was shot away, her topsail-sheet parted, and the stuns'l-boom was shot away. Having drawn swiftly past her stern, the *Wasp* now luffed up once more and ranged along the lee-side of the chase. There was no escape for her now. Blakely had her just where he wanted her; she had to fight, and if she were disabled she would drift down into his arms.

It was pitch dark, but the men on the *Wasp* could distinguish the black hulk of the English brig close to windward, although she showed no lights in her efforts to escape. The guns had been quickly reloaded with solid shot, and at close range the two vessels exchanged fierce broadsides. The gunners had nothing definite at which to aim but the intermittent flashes of the other ship's cannon, until Blakely detected a faint white line of foam where the black mass of waves swept along the side of his enemy at the water-line. He directed his men to make that gray line a target for their next shot.

His wisdom may be judged from this. If a shot struck the brig at, or just above, the water-line, it went smashing into her vitals. If it struck the water just before it touched the brig, it ricochettted upward and played havoc among the crew. The gun-practice of the American crew was, as usual, superb; that of the British very bad. One of the only three

THE *WASP* SINKS THE *AVON*

men hit on the *Wasp* in this engagement was actually struck by the remains of a gun-wad, so near were they. The two ships were so close in contact during the latter part of the action that the failure of the English to hit the *Wasp* was a mystery.

At any rate, a few moments before ten o'clock, Blakely, perceiving that the English fire had died away, ordered his men to hold their own fire. When silence supervened he hailed the enemy and asked if they had struck. Receiving an affirmative answer, he was about to call away the boats to take possession, when, through some unexplained mistake, the enemy reopened the battle with a volley of musketry from her tops, and a few straggling shot from her battery. The *Wasp* immediately returned two or three broadsides, which entirely silenced the English ship, when Blakely, unwilling to make a chopping-block out of her any longer, again hailed and asked if she had struck.

"Ay, ay, sir," cried a voice out of the darkness, fraught with anguish and humiliation, "we've struck! We've struck! The ship is sinking! Send us boats, for God's sake! We've none left!"

Directing Mr. Tillinghast to take charge, Blakely called away the second cutter, shouting at the same time that he would stand by the sinking brig to succor her men.

The Americans, cheering frantically in their delight at the result of the action, came tumbling aft to get the boat into the water. Before they could

IN THE WASP'S NEST

do it, however, Mr. Reilly, who had come up on the poop, happened to glance aft. There, out in the darkness, he saw the gray loom of the topsail of a ship. Instantly a line of light lanced out of the darkness and a shot screamed over the *Wasp*.

"Sail ho!" he cried.

It was the second ship of the enemy!

"Keep fast the boat!" thundered Blakely, instantly alive to the situation. "Man the lee braces! Man the starboard battery! Up with the helm!"

It was Blakely's plan to wear ship and run down toward the second vessel, but alas, when the braces were manned and the attempt made to swing the yards, it was found that so many of the braces had been cut that the evolution could not be performed. The second English ship had drawn nearer now, and she put her helm up and poured a harmless broadside into the *Wasp*, which Blakely answered as well as he could from his after-guns.

Meanwhile a third ship, the *Tartarus*, which appeared from heaven knows where and which was made out to be a larger ship-of-war than the *Wasp*, hove in sight on the other quarter. A sudden, sharp broadside hurled at her at close range caused her to pause, and Blakely, seeing that he was now hopelessly outnumbered, and, indeed, being unable from the loss of his braces to do anything else, reluctantly ran off before the wind, being urged to this decision by the knowledge that the two ships which

THE *WASP* SINKS THE *AVON*

had been far to leeward would also soon be at the scene of action.

He was pursued by the third ship for a short time, but soon dropped her behind and made his escape. Although Blakely never learned it, the English ship that he had beaten to a standstill and which had surrendered to him, but of which he had been unable to take possession, was the brig-of-war *Avon*, of the same size and armament as the *Reindeer*. Her first lieutenant and nine men had been killed, her commander, second lieutenant, sailing master, and twenty-nine seamen were wounded. The brig which first came to the succor of the *Avon*, and exchanged shots with the *Wasp*, was the *Castilian*, of the same size.

As the *Wasp* bore away, the men of the *Avon* hailed the *Castilian* and informed her that they were sinking. Thereupon the *Castilian's* boats were called in service, and by hard, desperate work they succeeded in getting all the survivors aboard of her by 1 A.M., when, just as the last boat drew off, the *Avon* went down headforemost, carrying with her into the depths the bodies of those who had perished on her decks.

So fierce had been the gun-fire of the *Wasp* that in thirty-one minutes she had dismasted the brig, killed and wounded over forty per cent. of her crew, and reduced her to a sinking condition, and this at the expense of two men killed and one wounded on the *Wasp*, a few round shot in her hull and some

IN THE WASP'S NEST

damage to sails and rigging and running gear, which she could easily repair at sea. No wonder that the men of the *Wasp*, from the smallest ship's boy to the young captain, carried themselves like cocks of the walk. They would hardly have hesitated to engage a frigate.

They had done exceedingly well that day. It is doubted if any single ship had ever been manœuvred and fought more effectively under such circumstances. They had cut out, burned, and destroyed the most valuable ship from a fleet convoyed by a seventy-four, and they had done it right under the nose of the great line-of-battle ship. They had boldly ventured into a circle of their enemies that evening, selected one of them, sunk her, and had partially engaged with two others, one of which they had beaten off, and had escaped in safety with so little damage as to be scarcely worth considering in both actions.

No wonder that those who had the midwatch in turned into their hammocks and slept the sleep of the hard-worked and well-doing. When morning broke, they had escaped all pursuit and were alone upon the ocean.

CHAPTER XXXI

LAST LETTERS HOME

"ALL you that wants to write letters home," bel-
lowed the chief boatswain's mate, "now's yer chance.
Drills an' exercises will be suspended until eight
bells by orders of the cap'n."

These remarks were greeted with enthusiastic
cheers by the men on the *Wasp*, cheers which pene-
trated even to the cabin, where Captain Blakely sat
writing a report to the Secretary of the Navy of the
events of the past few weeks, or of the cruise since
he had taken his departure from L'Orient.

After the smashing of the *Avon* and the escape
from the other ships, whose very presence convinced
the American that the English Channel had now
become too hot to hold him, since it was apparently
swarming with cruisers in couples which would infal-
libly get him if he continued longer in those waters,
Blakely determined to run down toward the path-
way of the South American and West Indian ships
in the hope of overhauling more valuable prizes, and
perhaps falling in with a sloop like the *Frolic*, or
some other match for the *Wasp*, on which he could
try the temper of his ship again.

There is no denying the fact that, barring the great

IN THE WASP'S NEST

Constitution, he commanded the luckiest and most efficient ship of the navy. The officers and crew worked like clock-work together, and they were possessed with such a sublime self-confidence that there was nothing they would have hesitated to attack. Of course they could not hope to make so many prizes in their new cruising ground as in the crowded English Channel, but their luck had not yet deserted them, for during the early part of the next month they overhauled two valuable brigs, both of which were burned, and on the 14th of September, they brought to another large and handsome brig after a long, hard chase, during which the brig made a stout resistance, being armed with eight guns.

This brig proved to be the most valuable prize of the cruise. She was from Bordeaux, France, bound to Pensacola, and was loaded with brandy, wine, silks, lace, and other costly French notions. A hasty examination of her manifest and bills of lading indicated to Blakely that she must be worth several hundred thousand dollars, and as the *Wasp* was now far from the more frequented waters, the captain decided to take the risk of sending her in.

He selected Midshipman Geisinger, the senior midshipman of the ship, to command her as prize-master, and directed him to endeavor to make some Southern port, Charleston or Savannah, where the blockade was not usually so rigorously maintained by the British. He gave him a prize crew of twelve

LAST LETTERS HOME

men, picked men at that, and ordered Ned Boston to go with him as his assistant. Presuming upon their old relationship and the affection in which his captain held him, Boston respectfully protested against being sent away from the *Wasp*.

"Why," said the captain, smiling down at the earnest, flushed face of the lad, as he stood before him in the cabin, "I thought you would like to go, Mr. Boston. I shall not attempt to take the *Wasp* home for two months yet, and if all goes well the brig ought to be in port in three weeks. She looks like a fast goer," he added, glancing out of the after port. "You know she is an American-built ship. She used to be the privateer *Siro* before the British captured her and renamed her. Mr. Geisinger is a careful fellow, and I have no doubt he will bring her in safely enough, given half a show. Therefore you run little risk. See what a chance you have to get on shore before the rest of us. The *Wasp* has done well on this cruise, too," continued the young captain, cheerfully, "and you will be a marked officer by simply letting it be known that you belong to her, you know."

"I'd rather stay here, sir," cried Boston, his face flushing with eager desire. "I wouldn't be happy even at home if the *Wasp* was at sea doing great things and I was not in her. You know, sir, we reefers think she is the luckiest ship afloat, and we wouldn't exchange out of her to get into the *Constitution* herself."

IN THE WASP'S NEST

"But your home, you know?"

"Oh, Captain Blakely," said Boston, sadly, "you know I have no real home."

"There is the commodore."

"Yes, sir. He is very kind to me and very proud of me," answered the little chap, gravely, "but he isn't my own father, you know, sir, and since I have been out on this cruise especially, I have often thought of it. I don't know whether I was born on the ocean or not, but I was christened at sea, and my mother was buried there. You know we're running down toward the place where I was picked up, and maybe—maybe—something might happen."

"My lad," said the captain, gravely, laying his hand on the boy's shoulder, "I understand your feelings. Well, you shall stay with me."

"Thank you, sir," said the boy, his face breaking into a smile, "thank you, sir."

"But I can give you no hope of finding out anything down here about your people. The ocean, you know, is a big place, and the greatest ship but a speck upon it, much less a human being."

"I know it, sir, but I have had a sort of a queer feeling, ever since we left L'Orient, that I might find my father, or he me, and it has been growing upon me. But whether I do or not, I don't want to leave the *Wasp* on any account, sir. I don't want to leave you, either," he went on, boldly.

LAST LETTERS HOME

"You shall not, then. I will let Geisinger take her in alone. I thought I was doing you a favor."

"No, sir; you don't favor me by taking me away from the ship as long as she is afloat."

"Very well," answered Blakely. "Run along now and tell the officer of the deck to pass the word to knock off work and drills and let all hands write letters, and do you write yourself, Mr. Boston, to old Commodore Little. He will be delighted to hear from you."

"Ay, ay, sir," cried the delighted boy, saluting and scampering off again.

It has been noted that the average education of the crew was much higher than was the rule on ships-of-war of the period. There was not a man aboard the *Wasp* who could not both read and write, for instance, a remarkable thing to say of any ship in that day, though some of them, like old Jack Lang, made a rather poor fist of it. Consequently in a short time every man-jack of the crew could be seen sprawling about on the decks, wherever he could find a place, laboriously scratching away on paper which had been secured from the purser's yeoman, the captain having directed that functionary to issue it, with other necessities for letter-writing, to all and sundry at his personal charge. Down in the cabin the ward-room officers were doing the same thing, and in the steerage an unwonted quiet had supervened as the youngsters gathered around the table and wrote their letters.

IN THE WASP'S NEST

The officers of the watch, the lookouts, and the men at the wheel were relieved in time to permit them to enjoy the privilege as well. Boston, having finished his letter and being off watch, went on deck and sauntered forward. He found old Jack Lang leaning over the rail abaft the after swifter of the starboard shrouds, meditatively looking at the *Atalanta*, the captured brig, hove to a short distance away.

"Written your letters, Jack?" asked the boy.

"Master Ned," said the old man, using the familiar address, seeing they were alone, the nearest people being busy in the slow work of laboriously writing, unfamiliar hands making what a sailor would call heavy weather of it—"Master Ned, I ain't writ none. I was jest a-thinkin' that there ain't nobody on earth that I kin write to. The ol' woman is dead long sence. I got one darter that's married, but she went west to Kintucky an' I've lost sight of her fer years. I doubt but that she's fergot me. My three boys, leastways they're grow'd men now, is sailor-men, an' God knows where they is. I don't. It's the fate of him wot goes down to the sea in ships, as I hev heered the Holy Joe on the *Constitution* say, to sarve all his life under the flag an' hev no friends in the endin' of it."

"Every man on the ship is your friend, Jack," said Boston.

"Ay, sir, in course. But the life of a sailor is made up of a lot of long cruises, an' a different lot

LAST LETTERS HOME

of friends, or enemies, as the case may be, for each ship. Once off the ship, they'd all forgit me."

"But I won't, Jack," said Boston, affectionately, laying his hand on his companion's arm.

The old man literally thrilled with pleasure at the touch as he looked down at the boy he loved.

"No, I guess not, Master Ned," he said, simply, "an' no more I won't fergit ye. I ain't never fergot you, Master Ned, sence I fust seed ye layin' on the floor with yer dead mammy on the transom above ye. The men was jeerin' an' laughin' w'en they heered I was detailed to take keer on ye, but I didn't keer. I swore to yer mother that I'd do my best fer ye, an' I've done it. That didn't perwent me from knockin' up some of the men who was most insultin' pretty severe like. So I reckon, arter all, you're all I've got. Sailor-men don't need no home. His home's his ship, an' with you an' the ship here, I don't need to write no letters."

"I wish somebody could tell me something about my mother and my father," said Ned. "I keep thinking more and more about them all the time. It wasn't far from here that I was picked up, you know, and if we hold our present course, and the captain says we are likely to do it, we'll run down to the very spot. Something might happen."

"It mought," said the sailor.

"You don't think it will, do you?"

"I don't know. I can't tell. Mighty strange

IN THE WASP'S NEST

things often happens on sea, an' perhaps they will ag'in. I hope so fer your sake, anyway, lad."

"I hope so, too ; I pray so."

"Well, wotever happens to ye, Master Ned, an' I think sometimes you'll turn out to be a dook or a king, or somethin' of that kind—" went on the old man, vaguely, impelled thereto by his admiration for his handsome young charge, "you won't fergit yer ol' friends, an' turn yer back on any of 'em."

"Never!" said the boy. "And I want to be nothing but a plain American boy. If I found my father and he turned out to be anything else I'd almost be sorry I ever found him," he added, passionately.

"That's the true blue, my little hearty!" laughed the old man ; "there ain't no dook ner king that I'm acquainted with, w'ich I'll admit I don't know werry many of the sort, that ekals the man that kin say of the flag at the gaff-end yonder, 'That's mine!'"

"All you that have yer letters writ," called out the boatswain's mate of the watch, after piping for attention, "bring them aft to the mast. Mail'll close in five minutes. So bear a hand, you scribblers!"

The time had come when the writing of the messages must be stopped then. There was a prodigious hurry to get the letters safely in their envelopes, and those envelopes properly sealed and addressed, but at the appointed time all were ready. Geisinger, with a stout canvas mail-bag stuffed to bursting

LAST LETTERS HOME

with messages grave and gay, to officials, mothers, fathers, sweethearts, wives, and children, shook hands with his captain, touched his hat to the colors, dropped lightly down into his boat, and was rowed over to the *Atalanta*. The men hung over the rail watching her while she swung her yards and filled away.

They were as happy as successful seamen on a lucky and well-found ship, commanded by a humane captain, and officers who took their cues from him, could well be, yet there were many full hearts and swimming eyes, which they would have died rather than show to their shipmates, as they gazed upon the little brig ripping away to the westward, bound for home. And there would have been wetter eyes and fuller hearts, and more longing glances cast after her, if they could have realized that the little brig carried the last words that were ever to be received by those loved ones at home from any member of the crew, save two, on that noble little ship.

CHAPTER XXXII

RUN DOWN AT LAST

THE run to the southwest had been rather uneventful after the departure of the *Atalanta*. They picked up and destroyed one or two small prizes, but they were not disappointed at the fact that they sighted practically no ships, for they were not yet on the track in which the captain conceived he would be apt to take many prizes. One little happening, however, broke the monotony of their trip very pleasantly.

In latitude $18^{\circ} 35'$ north, longitude $30^{\circ} 10'$ west, on the morning of the 9th of October, they overhauled a Swedish barque bound from Rio Janeiro to England. Mr. Tillinghast and Ned Boston boarded her with the third cutter to overhaul her papers. Finding her belonging to a neutral power they returned to the ship with the information for Captain Blakely that there were two strangers on board of her. These were American officers, who had belonged to the United States frigate *Essex*, Captain David Porter, which had recently been destroyed, after a most desperate defence, by the British frigate *Phæbe* and the corvette *Cherub*. These vessels had violated the neutrality of a Chil-

RUN DOWN AT LAST

ean port and had taken the *Essex* at a great disadvantage. Lieutenants Lyman and McKnight had been released on parole and were endeavoring to make their way back to the United States *via* Brazil and Europe.

Blakely was delighted to receive them, and a boat was sent to bring them to the *Wasp*, which, they were informed, would sail for the United States by the end of the month. After the American officers had come aboard it was discovered that Lieutenant McKnight had left his writing-desk on the Swedish vessel. Signals were made by the barque's commander, the *Wasp* hove to again, while Boston was sent to fetch the desk and papers. Messrs. McKnight and Lyman were anxious to be of service, but their parole prevented them from being regularly placed on the *Wasp's* papers and assigned to duty, although, except in action, they did watch duty as volunteers.

A few days after this occurrence the *Wasp* ran into a hot, low-hanging, heavy fog, which persisted in covering the ocean for several days. There was little or no wind and she was practically becalmed in a tropical sea. So far as seeing anything, they might have been under a gray blanket, for the fog was so thick that they could not distinguish the forecastle from the quarter-deck; nor could they hear anything either, although the best men were kept constantly on watch, with ears alert, to catch every possible sound.

Shortly after noon of the third day of the fog, the

IN THE WASP'S NEST

lookout—or the “hear out” would perhaps better describe him—on the main topsail yard detected two faint notes of a ship’s bell coming down the wind. The fog was thinning somewhat and gave promise of lifting altogether before the night, but it was still too thick to permit one to see farther than a cable’s length from the ship. What breeze there was came in fitful catpaws from the direction in which they had heard the sound of a bell.

As soon as the first notes had been reported to him, Blakely had ordered that the *Wasp’s* bell should not be struck and that everybody should keep silent about the decks under pain of his severest displeasure. The *Wasp*, therefore, so far as humanity was concerned, was as still as death. The officers and men clustered about what had been the weather-rail when there had been any wind, eagerly listening, and the silence was only broken by the creaking of the timbers, the straining of the cordage, and the flapping of the topsails as the *Wasp* slowly rolled to and fro in the leaden, glassy sea.

The captain sometimes spoke in low tones to the officers congregated near him, and Ned Boston and Jack Lang, who happened to be in the maintop at the time, exchanged confidences in whispers.

“D’ye hear that sound, Master Ned?” asked the old man, “it’s nigher’n it was w’en we fust heered it.”

“How can that be?” answered Boston. “There’s no wind.”

RUN DOWN AT LAST

"But didn't you never hear that ships in a calm naturally drift down to each other? Wait till ye hear the next bell."

The half hours between the bells had never seemed so long as on that afternoon, but as the successive periods were rung it was evident, even to ears less keen than those of the chief boatswain's mate, that the ship with the bell was slowly drawing nearer. They also guessed from the tone of the bell that it was a large one, and naturally inferred that it was hung on a heavy ship—a frigate, probably.

There was something uncanny and unsettling in the sound of that bell ringing out through the fog and drawing steadily nearer, yet there was nothing that could be done. The wind had apparently fallen to a dead calm, save for a very fitful puff at very rare intervals, which seemed to the advantage of the stranger. For one thing, to their great relief, it was gradually growing lighter about them. As old Jack whispered to the boy :

"It won't be long afore the sky clears an' we kin see wot's yon."

Indeed, about eight bells in the afternoon, the fog had so far gone that Jack, who had been staring steadily in the direction of the sound, was at last convinced that he saw the ship.

"Off there, sir!" he pointed, clutching the midshipman by the arm, and whispering fiercely in his intense excitement, "Don't you see it! It's a ship! See! The mist thins! She rises! Yon's

IN THE WASP'S NEST

a tops'l! By the Lord, it's a frigate! It's no American ship nuther!"

"I see it," Boston whispered, staring intently along the seaman's outstretched arm.

"Shall I sing out?" asked the old man.

"By no means," answered the boy. "I'll slide down the back-stay and inform the captain."

He swung his legs over the rim of the top, and in an instant slipped down the back-stay and dropped in the gangway. He ran aft as fast as he could go, and dashed unceremoniously up the poop-ladder in his haste.

"A sail, sir! We've seen it!" he said, touching his cap. "Off the starboard quarter, yonder. We made her tops'ls out. It's a heavy frigate."

"Who was in the top with you?"

"Lang, sir."

"What does he say?"

"He says it's no American frigate, sir."

"He ought to know," said Blakely, pressing his lips with anxiety. "Lord!" he muttered, "for a bit of wind! Mr. Reilly," he added, turning to his most trusted officer, "go you aloft, sir, with a glass and see what you can make of it."

As Reilly seized the telescope and sprang into the starboard mizzen shrouds Blakely looked over at the quartermaster standing at the wheel.

"Any steerage way?" he questioned.

"No, sir," was the low reply.

"Of course not," he muttered, glancing over the

RUN DOWN AT LAST

side and seeing how absolutely motionless the ship lay, the sails hanging flat against the mast with a lifeless droop that bespoke their utter present inutility.

"If it clears this way," the captain said, softly, to Mr. Tillinghast, "we shall be able to see her from the deck soon."

"I think I can make her out now," said Tillinghast, who had been staring to windward, "that blur yonder! Isn't that a ship, sir?"

"I believe it is," said the captain, looking in turn, and taking off his hat and wiping the sweat from his forehead.

At this moment Reilly came down from aloft.

"'Tis a large frigate, sir. Well out of range to starboard. It looks like an English frigate. There she is!" he cried, suddenly pointing through the thinning mist to where the ship rose gray and wraithlike before them.

Officers and men alike stared at the stranger. As is often the case, the fog, which had been so slowly disappearing, suddenly vanished at last as if by magic. There, on the starboard quarter, lay a large frigate, an English frigate without doubt, one of the new design which had been built since the war began, and on American lines, too, to cope with the American ships of the *Constitution* class.

The *Wasp* was absolutely helpless before her. She could have engaged three, and at a pitch, four, like the American sloop with fair chance of success.

IN THE WASP'S NEST

Fortunately for the *Wasp*, the frigate was far out of range now, even of her longest and heaviest guns, and for the present the American was safe.

The Englishmen sighted the *Wasp*, of course, nearly as soon as they had been observed. Concealment being useless, Blakely, in order to try his companion, immediately hoisted the English flag. The stranger retorted by displaying American colors. Blakely therefore hoisted a Spanish ensign, and the ship returned with the French tricolor. After several moments of this amusing game, however, the English vessel flew a set of signals, which the *Wasp*, of course, was unable to answer. To mystify him Blakely set some signals which meant nothing. But he soon tired of this trifling play and, hauling down his mock signals, set his own American flag, whereupon the frigate flung out the English colors, and the several flags were thereafter allowed to float over the respective vessels.

They drifted along during the greater part of the late afternoon, gradually drawing nearer to each other as they lay in the dead calm. At the rate they were drifting together the *Wasp* would be within gunshot range of the British before morning. There was now not a breath of air stirring. The sun was setting, a dim, lurid, coppery ball. The sea was like greasy glass, leaden and oily-looking.

The weather indications were ominous and threatening. The oldest and most experienced seamen, like Lang, were sure that the conditions

RUN DOWN AT LAST

foreboded one of those terrific storms which are prevalent in the fall in those latitudes. As the sun sank duller and more malignant in its appearance than any of them had ever seen it, Blakely decided upon a course which he had been considering all afternoon.

He deliberately took in sail. The sails were doing him no good anyway, and if the anticipated storm struck him suddenly and caught him with everything set, the *Wasp* would either go down all standing, or else the masts would be ripped out of her, and the end would be the same if he were to lose control of his ship in the heavy sea. Therefore he calmly furled his royals and top-gallantsails, took in his mizzen topsail, furled the mainsail, took two reefs in his fore and maintop sails, double-reefed the foresail, and set his fore staysail. Then he sent down his royal and top-gallant yards and housed his top-gallant masts.

Having thus stripped his ship, he next sent his crew to quarters and double-shotted the carronades with a stand of grape and a solid shot. The guns were then secured and he ordered out his boats.

So long as they could see them the English ship had followed their movements exactly. Her captain also disliked the weather indications as much as the American and concluded it was the part of wisdom to take similar precautions. By this time it seemed to the Americans sufficiently dark to prevent the Englishmen from ascertaining what they

IN THE WASP'S NEST

were doing. Therefore Blakely dropped his boats in the water and began to tow the ship away from the proximity of her huge and dangerous enemy. The English captain was equally resourceful, however. Divining his antagonist's purpose, he also manned the boats of the frigate and started after him. For at least two hours this arduous work was kept up in the early night. So violent was the exertion in the hot, humid air, that the *Wasp's* sturdy crew were almost prostrated by it.

Blakely finally called in the boats, deeming that he had perhaps succeeded in shaking off the frigate. He could neither see nor hear anything of her in the darkness. It was as black as pitch overhead, not a star showing. The men lay on the deck panting like dogs, with their tongues hanging out of their mouths in the heat, from the violent labor. The officers, too, were almost as worn out as the men. They had taken their turns in the cutters, relieving some overdone men at the terrible work at the oars.

Blakely hoped he had escaped, and he would have done so, for the crew of the frigate were not able to tow that huge ship with the same rapidity that the Americans could pull the smaller and lighter *Wasp* along, but about ten o'clock at night a faint breeze sprang up. The frigate caught it some time before the *Wasp*, and, although it was pitch dark and not a light was shown on either vessel, by some strange chance the English ship had kept right on

RUN DOWN AT LAST

the heels of the American. Her boats had been overhauled and run up to the davits without checking her way after the wind had struck her, and before the catspaw had fairly reached the *Wasp* the black mass of the frigate loomed out on the weather quarter close aboard.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE END OF THE *WASP*

BLAKELY was caught. Luck had deserted the *Wasp* and had favored her enemy. He could do nothing more to escape.

"Lads," he said to his crew, "yon ship is an enemy. She has overhauled us. We can't get away. Shall I strike our flag? We have no chance with her, you know, once she gets alongside. Or will you stand by me?"

"Strike the enemy, blast her, Cap'n Blakely!" roared old Jack Lang.

"Don't give up the ship, sir!" cried a second man.

"Ay, ay, sir, that's the talk!" yelled another.

"We'll stand by you, sir!" shouted Billy Bowline.

"We'll show the frigate that she can't tackle us," yelled a fourth.

"We'll give them *Reindeer* play," thundered another.

The ship was filled with enthusiastic shouts of confident defiance.

"Wot!" continued old Jack, when he could be heard. "Give up the sassy little *Wasp* to anythin' that floats! I'd ruther sink alongside. Eh, mates?"

THE END OF THE *WASP*

"Jack's right," cried the men. "We'll fight her till she sinks."

"Well done," roared Blakely, in triumph at the resolution of his brave crew. "Man the starboard battery! Cast loose and provide! Lively! No firing until I give the word!"

The English ship did not waste any time in preliminaries. As soon as she was fairly abreast a blaze of light from one of the long heavy guns of her broadside shivered the blackness and a twenty-four-pound shot came ripping over the quarter of the *Wasp* in the darkness to leeward.

"That's the way they shoot, lads!" cried Blakely, cheerily. "No harm's done."

But he had scarcely spoken the words before an entire broadside came hurtling aboard. Most of the shot were badly aimed in the darkness, but some of them found a mark, and the crashing of timber was succeeded by screams of agony, and some there were who were hit who never screamed again.

"Keep fast the battery!" yelled Blakely, seeing that he was not yet in good working range of his smaller carronades. "She is nearing us every minute. Avast until we get well within range of her!"

The English ship came up handily now and poured another broadside, which did much more damage.

"God!" groaned Blakely. "This is terrible!"

The silence on the *Wasp* seemed to puzzle the

IN THE WASP'S NEST

Englishman, however, for he sheered in closer by shifting his helm and hailed.

"We're in good range now, sir," said Mr. Carr, looking out into the darkness between the two ships.

"This is His Britannic Majesty's frigate *Diomede*, forty, Captain Philip L'Estrange. Do you strike your flag?" cried the Britisher in the black dark.

"Stand by, lads!" roared Blakely, in a voice of thunder. "Fire!"

The whole broadside of the *Wasp* was hurled slap dash into the British ship at close range. It was instantly answered by another. The nine thirty-two-pounder carronades in the *Wasp's* battery did much damage aboard the English frigate, but the return tempest of iron that was poured upon the devoted American from the twenty-six odd broadside guns of the frigate did terrible execution. The heavy bolts from the forty-two-pound carronades simply smashed her into bits. The two ships exchanged broadsides again and again.

After ten minutes of close fighting Mr. Baury was killed, Mr. Reilly was severely wounded, a grape-shot struck little Boston in the arm, breaking it and hurling him down where he stood on the quarter-deck. He had been detailed from the top to be the captain's aide that night. Mr. Knight, who had passed through the terrible slaughter on the *Essex*, was literally swept overboard by a heavy shot which struck him fair in the chest and tore him to

THE END OF THE *WASP*

pieces, and Mr. Lyman was struck down. The *Wasp's* crew was decimated by the first discharges, and the subsequent mortality among them was fearful.

"Oh, God! This is awful!" cried Blakely, in agony as he saw the effect of the enemy's fire.

Perhaps to save the useless slaughter of his crew he might have struck his flag, although the English could not have seen it come down. He would never have surrendered on his own account, however, for no braver man ever lived than Johnston Blakely. But such was the tremendous noise of the battle, for the ships were near enough for small arms to be effectively used, that no signals would have been seen and no voice heard, he simply could not strike. The only thing that would suffice to notify the other side that the *Wasp* had surrendered, if she did, would have been the virtual stoppage of her fire.

But the men at the guns had no thought of stopping. They loaded and served the carronades as they had never been served before. Broadside after broadside they pluckily sent into the frigate. Shot came sweeping through the *Wasp's* ports, sometimes a single one taking off half a gun crew. Some of the carronades were dismounted, but those of their crews left alive united upon other guns to keep up the battle.

The deck was filled with dead and dying. No attempt could be made to care for the wounded.

IN THE WASP'S NEST

Those seriously hurt suffered or died where they fell. Those of the wounded able to move about, under the tremendous exigency went to the guns again. Even the surgeon and his mates deserted the cock-pit and lent a hand.

But against such disparity or odds nothing would avail ; gallantry, courage, resolution, all were useless. The reply of the Americans grew fainter and fainter, as gun after gun went out of action, either because it was dismantled or because there were no men left to serve it. The *Wasp* herself was a ruin. Another broadside or two and she would be sunk where she lay.

Suddenly the fire of the English frigate stopped. The last gun discharged from her had been loaded with grape-shot and one of them had hit Blakely fair in the breast, inflicting a mortal wound. But the young captain caught a stay before he fell, and held himself erect for a few moments. Naturally the *Wasp's* fire had stopped, too—there was nothing left to fire with.

A sudden, sharp hail came down from the English ship. They were so close now that the few remaining men of the *Wasp* could easily hear what was said.

“Look alive !” the voice shouted out of the darkness, a note of terror and alarm thrilling through it. “See yonder ! The storm ! Up with your helm !”

It was a message of advice and warning from the

THE END OF THE *WASP*

English ship to the American corvette they had been doing their best to destroy.

"Shiver my timbers!" screamed old Jack Lang, rising from the deck where he had been hurled by a shot which had grazed his forehead and stunned him for a moment. "Look yonder!"

Away off to windward the sky was clear overhead. Sudden lights twinkled in the heavens. They were stars. The black clouds that had hung like a pall had been torn asunder as if by a mighty hand, and the wind was coming. As they stared at the stars they suddenly went out again in a white smother of spray and foam. The hurricane was about to break upon them! It would be dreadfully dangerous for the *Wasp* to try to scud before the tempest in her position, but could she be brought by the wind?

"Hard down with the helm!" instantly cried Blakely, forgetting his death-wound and everything else for the moment, with every instinct of a sailor at his command.

"The wheel's shot away, sir," answered a faint voice from the deck.

"Jump to the relieving tackles! For your lives, men!" roared Blakely. "Round in those weather fore braces! Brace up the mizzen topsail!"

"The mizzen topmast is gone, sir," cried Lang.

"Get a pull on these fore braces then."

"Carried away, sir," said another voice.

"Ah, well," whispered Blakely. "It's all over!"

IN THE WASP'S NEST

At that instant the storm struck them. The English ship, with her huge scantlings and massive spars, although badly damaged and cut up, and having lost many men, had not suffered like the *Wasp*. As the storm struck her she put her helm down and swung up to the wind. There was one breathless, fearful moment aboard her to discover if anything essential should part, but everything held and she lay safe for the present.

Meanwhile upon the poor *Wasp*, not answering her helm and deprived of her after-sail and unable to brace her yards up, fell the full force of the tempest. There was nothing to do but scud—that is, run before it. The few men left were at the relieving tackles doing their best to control the uneasy ship, jumping and swinging from side to side in the driving hurricane. The strain was tremendous upon them. They could scarcely steer her.

Blakely now sank down on deck at the break of the poop above the wheel. He was almost done for.

"Is there any one left alive here?" he called out brokenly.

"My arm is broken, sir," said little Boston, "but I'm here at your orders."

"Well done, lad," gasped the captain, faintly. "I've got a bullet in the breast that does for me. Jump to the main deck and see if you can find an officer unhurt."

Slowly Boston made his way to the battery.

THE END OF THE *WASP*

Presently he came across Mr. Tillinghast, wounded, but able to move about, and old Jack Lang.

"The captain is mortally wounded," gulped out the boy, putting his ear close to the two men, "he wants you on the poop."

The two followed after, old Jack pressing Boston's unwounded hand with his own. Indeed the boy was so faint that the old man almost carried him at last.

"What of the ship?" gasped Blakely, as the two men and the boy struggled over to him.

"She's lost, sir," said old Jack, solemnly. "There ain't a dozen men left alive on her, an' they're at the relievin' tackles. Mr. Boston," said the old man, "be ye hurt badly?"

"I think my arm's broken, Jack," sobbed the boy, "but I'm all right."

"There is nothing to do, Tillinghast, is there?" asked the captain. "I can't see, I'm done for."

"Nothing."

"Are they all gone? Reilly, Baury, my boys, the men?"

"All, sir."

"God have mercy on them."

The ship was still racing along at a tremendous speed before the fearful tempest. Fortunately the foremast and foretopmast still held. The mizzen topmast had gone early in the action, and the main topmast was shaky. The ship steered uneasily, and the work of the few exhausted men at the relieving

IN THE WASP'S NEST

tackles grew harder. The wounded left alive stilled their groans before the coming catastrophe and waited. The *Wasp* would either broach to or be brought by her lee in a few moments. — In either case the end would be swift and certain.* Blakely lay on his deck like a Viking of old, while his ship, with her cargo of dead, dying, and devoted, raced on before the storm.

“She can’t outlast this long,” he muttered. “Well, thank God we never struck the flag. Little Boston, you ought to have gone home, Mr. Tillinghast——”

On a sudden there came a brief lull.

“What’s that?” cried the captain, fearfully, raising himself on his hand.

“Stand by!” roared Lang, who knew what it boded.

The next second, with a crash like a thousand thunder-bolts, the wind veered and fell upon them again.

“She’s brought by the lee! God help us,” shouted the old sailor, and the next instant, with everything flat aback, the *Wasp* began to heave over to starboard and down aft.

* “To broach to is to incline suddenly to windward of the ship’s course, so as to present her side to the wind, and endanger her oversetting. The difference between broaching to and bringing by the lee may be thus defined. Suppose a ship under great sail is steering south, having the wind at N. N. W.; then, west is the weather side, and east is the lee side. If, by any accident, her head turns round to the westward, so that her sails are all taken aback on the weather side, she is said to broach to. If, on the contrary, her head declines so far eastward as to lay her sails aback on that side, which was the lee side, it is called bringing by the lee.”

THE END OF THE *WASP*

"We're aback, we're aback!" he cried, and the appeal penetrated the ear of the dying sailor captain. True to his instinct, he gave the right commands in the fatal emergency.

"Hard aport!" he shouted, in a voice of amazing strength. "Man the starboard braces fore and aft! Rise foretack and sheet! Clear away the head bowlines! Brace full the head yards! Shiver in aft! Lively, men, lively, for God's sake! Save the ship! For God's sake! God——"

It was his last word. The life-blood gushed from his lips as he spoke it.

Alas, there were few to hear his orders, none able to carry them out, and no means of doing it on that wrecked ship had there been many. As she lay over to starboard the water streamed into her vitals through her riven sides. The maintopmast carried away with a crash, but the stout foretopmast held like an iron column.

The ship lifted, lifted, lifted. The water came rippling over the deck. It was awash. Now the taff-rail touched the water-line. A wave came flooding in, enfolding dead Blakely in a rippling caress. The forward sails lay against the mast as flat and as hard as sheets of steel. Nothing carried away. By a miracle the fire of the English frigate had spared the fore part of the ship. Nothing could save her now. She was going down! Mr. Tillinghast had run forward to see what could be done at the captain's cry, and he and the remainder of the crew

IN THE WASP'S NEST

were huddled together on the top-gallant fore-castle.

Aft on the poop-deck lay the dead body of the young captain, with little Boston and Jack Lang.

"He's gone," sobbed the little boy, bending over his beloved captain.

"Ay, an' his ship's gone!" cried the old sailor.

Suddenly he clasped the lad in one arm, seized a couple of hatch gratings in his other, and leaped far out to leeward. At the same instant the foretopmast gave way at last under the pressure. The fearful wind drove it clear of the ship as if it had been a straw. It struck near where the sailor was struggling in the waters with the dead weight of the boy in his arms. A violent blow nearly wrenched little Boston away from him. The loss of the topmast relieved the pressure forward, and, had it come earlier, might have saved the ship temporarily, but it was too late now.

Under the bright starlight the old man dragged the body of the lad up on the spar, held him there, while he watched the tidy little *Wasp* sink beneath the sea. She went down with all hands, except himself and the midshipman, aboard of her. She went down into the deep with her cargo of dead and dying and living, with her flag that had never been struck fluttering at the gaff end, and her captain dead upon her decks.

The two were left alone in that awful sea. Fortunately, the force of the hurricane was as yet so

THE END OF THE *WASP*

tremendous that the sea was comparatively smooth, flattened out, as it were, by the tempest. Lang dragged the yard, which was swinging loose alongside the mast, lashed the boy to the spar, and took a turn about his own waist to make himself secure, with some of the trailing rope.

"Master Ned," he asked, piteously, in the darkness, "be ye hurt, sir?"

"I think," murmured the boy feebly, "that something must have struck me as I fell. I can't talk," he muttered. "Wait till morning."

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE CASTAWAYS

A LEADEN sky and an angry sea.

A shattered spar adrift in the tossing waves ; two human mites in a waste of water, clinging tenaciously to the last bit of what had once been a gallant ship. A blue-eyed, sunny-haired boy, some of the light vanished from his eyes, some of the color gone from his cheek. A night of battle, of storm, of anguish mental and physical, long thoughts of a foundered ship, a dying captain, lost comrades, on the one hand ; and, on the other, the pain of an arm broken by a grape-shot, a little body that had been sorely battered by the waves which had dashed him against the spar and even now swept over him from time to time—that was little Boston's case.

And the other bit of human flotsam ? Over the brave little midshipman, who was stifling his moans and bearing his pain like the little hero he was, leaned the old sailor, who loved the youth more than life itself. All the terrible happenings of the last hours of the cruise were forgotten, lost in the consuming anxiety of old Jack Lang for his young companion.

With the trailing gearing of the top-mast and the

THE CASTAWAYS

remains of the top-sail, with parts of the yard, and with one or two other bits of timber, the old man had made a sort of rude raft. He had lashed the pieces together with a seaman's skill, even in the darkness of the long night. It was big enough to allow the boy to lie straight and to keep the spar from being rolled over and over by the swirling, tossing seas.

On this raft the little chap was lashed, his head resting on the old man's jacket, and a turn of rope taken about Lang's own mighty waist also served to keep him from being swept away. When he had made such arrangements at night as their situation permitted he had taken the lad tenderly in his arms and had laid himself down on the little raft with his huge body to windward, trying to shelter him if he could from the breaking waves of the cruel sea.

The boy had been a little delirious during the night. There was, therefore, no check to prevent the old man from giving way to his feelings. He fairly crooned over the lad and cuddled him in his arms in his rude way, as a mother might have done with a child. He recalled those quaint, sweet hours of his early association when the boy had lain in his arms as a little baby, and he had sworn to protect him. Into the plain heart of the rude sailor little Boston had entered as no one else, not even the children of his own flesh and blood, had ever been able to do.

So the slow, long hours wore away until the morning broke and they could see about them. Rising

IN THE WASP'S NEST

on his knees, steadying himself by a bit of the cross-trees, which still remained in place, the man searched the horizon. There was nothing to be seen. Not a vestige of the *Wasp*, not a shattered spar, or timber, even, was in sight. The English frigate had been driven beyond the reach of his vision. The two were alone, absolutely and entirely alone.

Now that daylight enabled Lang to see what he was doing, he wrenched two pieces of wood from the splintered end of the yard-arm, and with his sheath-knife deftly shaped them into rough splints. Then he tore his shirt into long strips, and with these rude contrivances he tenderly and with much skill bound up the boy's arm, after setting the broken bones as well as he could on the tossing spar. He was not without some knowledge of surgery of a primitive kind, knowledge which he had picked up in years of service and which he had often applied before this.

The whole process severely hurt the midshipman, who had entirely recovered consciousness in the morning, but he bore the pain without flinching, and even contrived to smile at some of the rough banter with which old Jack strove to hide his own grief and reassure the boy. When he had done everything possible for Ned, the sailor strengthened his raft somewhat so that the water no longer dashed over them so violently as it had done, but that was all. There was nothing else to be done, absolutely nothing. There was no water to drink,

THE CASTAWAYS

no food to eat, no work to do. Old Jack Lang had to crouch down on these bits of rope-lashed wreckage by the side of Boston and wait for what might happen.

By and by the midshipman sank into a troubled sleep, and the old man, disposing himself so that he afforded a partial shelter to the boy, watched him as the hours dragged along. For once in his life he had no desire to talk. He sat with his arms folded in that way he had and gazed. His intellectual resources were limited, his mental capacities small, but his sorrow and anxiety for the boy were perhaps the greater on that account.

How he had dreamed and hoped for that lad! How he had loved him and cared for him! What pride and pleasure he had taken in his career! How brilliant and full of promise his short life had been! Was this to be the end of it all? Was it to end there on that raft on that ocean waste? Out of the deep, with its mystery, the boy had come; into the deep, with its mystery, was he to go? It could not be! Surely God would spare the last, this only one of all that company of brave hearts and true? For himself it made no difference. He did not count. He was only a sailor, an old, old man. No ending could be fitter than for him to go down in the great waters and come up no more. He did not care. He was willing, if only the boy might be spared.

By and by, about noon, Boston opened his eyes, and saw the haggard face of the old man bending

IN THE WASP'S NEST

over him. Ned had forgotten for the moment where they were and what had happened to them.

"Jack," he asked, feebly, "what are we doing here? Where's the *Wasp*? Oh, this—this—awful pain!"

He laid his hand upon his shattered arm.

"Master Ned," said the old sailor, "don't-you remember the night-battle? The ship goin' down with all hands, 'ceptin' you an' me?"

"Yes, yes," said the boy, knitting his brow with the effort of recollection, "I remember. This arm was broken by a grape-shot, and you picked me up after she foundered, did you not?"

"I seized ye in my arms on deck w'en I seen wot was happenin', an' jumped with ye."

"Of course. And then you made this raft, and in the morning bound up my arm. Thank you, good old Jack," continued the boy, smiling faintly.

"Does yer arm pain ye much, sir?" queried the sailor, anxiously.

"Not so very much, you fixed it up so well."

"'Taint the fust time I've spliced a splintered human spar, Master Boston."

"No, I suppose not. What time is it?"

"About mid-day, eight bells, I makes it, sir."

"Anything in sight?"

"Nothin', sir, leastways not yet," answered the sailor after a long gaze around the gray horizon line.

"And nothing to eat, no water to drink, nothing——"

"Nothin' but God A'mighty, Master Boston, an'

THE CASTAWAYS

if He goes back on ye I don't know wot we'll do."

"He won't, Jack, I'm sure. And I feel somehow as if we were going to be picked up soon. I'm certain of it, Jack," answered the boy, confidently.

"I hope so, sir, and 'taint impossible. There'd ought to be many ships passin' along here. It's the reg'lar route fer the East Indies. Only they'rē likely to be Britishers."

"Well, we'll be saved, anyway, I am sure. I can stand this another day or two. And wasn't it glorious fighting, Jack?"

"Finest I ever seed, sir; less'n 'twas the time we licked the *Serrypis*."

After a long pause the lad spoke again.

"Jack, that locket of mine?"

"Here 'tis, Master Ned," said the old man, lifting it up.

"I thought the mast might have crushed it. It was about here, the captain said, they picked me up—my mother and me. Let me look at her face again," he asked.

With his thick, coarse hands the old man fumbled at the locket until he had opened it. Then he unclasped the chain and put the open case in the boy's left hand. Ned lifted the open locket and gazed a long time at the pictured face.

"My beautiful mother," he said, half to himself, and almost as if he had been addressing her. "Jack,

IN THE WASP'S NEST

she gives me confidence. I know we'll be picked up," he added, turning to the sailor.

So the weary day dragged slowly along until the night fell upon the hungry, thirsty castaways. For Jack the privations were not yet very severe, however, but little Boston, made of less stern stuff, and with the added disability of his broken arm, suffered so that when the day broke he was in a raging fever and so delirious that he was not able to understand the meaning of the announcement or to enter into the joy with which the sailor discovered the sails of a large ship bearing down upon them in the morning.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE *BREDERODE* TO THE RESCUE

"MR. SNYDER," said the officer of the watch to a smart young midshipman gravely pacing the lee side of the quarter-deck, "give my compliments to Captain Van Rooy and tell him we have sighted a raft with a man on it, and I have changed the course of the ship and am now heading toward it."

"Ay, ay, sir!" answered the reefer, saluting and disappearing through the door under the poop-deck of the *Brederode*, a huge old-fashioned, high-pooed Dutch East Indiaman outward bound for Batavia.

Tnese famous traders sailed with very heavy crews and a full complement of young midshipmen, who, later, were graduated into watch officers as they were capable, and finally became the commanders of the different ships of the fleet. The Indiamen were all armed for protection against the pirates of the Eastern seas, and the drill and discipline maintained were not unlike those of a man-of-war. The officers were all uniformed, too, in semi-naval fashion.

Captain Van Rooy, a stout, fat little Dutchman, of huge girth, whose build inevitably suggested the shape of his squabby, bluff-bowed ship, came bustling

IN THE WASP'S NEST

on deck a few moments after receiving the midshipman's message. After a quick glance to windward, and a longer, more comprehensive look aloft, after the habit of the true sailor, he turned to the officer of the watch.

"Good-morning, Mr. de Kaater."

"Good-morning, Captain Van Rooy," answered the watch officer, who, by the way, belonged to the same Dutch family from which the ancestors of the great American Decatur had come.

"You say you have sighted a raft, sir?"

"Yes, sir."

"And are heading for it?"

"Yes, sir. We shall overhaul it in half an hour."

"And there is a man in it?"

"Two, sir; at least one of them is a boy."

"Are they alive?" asked the captain, nimbly mounting the poop ladders as he spoke.

"One of them is, sir," answered De Kaater, stepping to the weather side of the poop and pointing. "There they are! right ahead, sir. You can see the man waving his hands. Through the glass," he continued, proffering the telescope to the captain, who immediately seized it, adjusted it, and fixed it on the raft, "you can make out the other smaller figure, which seems quite still. I misdoubt that one will be dead, sir."

"Yes, I see them now. Poor fellows! It's a lucky thing the old *Brederode* happened along. You have done well, sir, in heading for them without



The castaways.



THE BREDERODE TO THE RESCUE

orders. Now order a boat got ready at once. I don't want that spar battering against the ship in this sea. Ah, Mr. Denton, good-morning."

"Good-morning, Captain Van Rooy," answered a tall, thin man, whose tanned, sunburned, weather-beaten face could not disguise his Americanism. He spoke Dutch with a pronounced accent, too, although he expressed himself fluently and with ease.

"You are rising early this morning, sir," continued the captain. "Our beautiful *Brederode* has not yet completed her morning toilet," he added, looking forward at the groups of bare-legged sailors scrubbing decks, coiling down running rigging, and otherwise preparing the ship for the day.

"Yes, Van Rooy," returned Mr. Denton, "but you know it was just here that the *William of Nassau* was burned fourteen years ago, and I lost my wife and baby—and I could not sleep for thinking of it."

"I know, I know," said the captain, kindly patting Mr. Denton on the back with his fat, pudgy hand.

They were old friends, this little Dutch skipper and the tall American. Denton was an American, a Carolinian, who had gone years before to the Island of Batavia, to take up the life of a planter. He had gone out there on a sister ship to the *Brederode* with his young wife and his son, a baby, born on a previous voyage from New York to Amsterdam.

IN THE WASP'S NEST

The ship, the *William of Nassau*, had caught fire in the middle of the night. At the first alarm he had placed his wife and baby in one of the ship's boats towing astern, and the painter attaching the boat to the ship had been burned away and the boat had drifted out to sea. The Indiaman had been burned to the water's edge, her crew had been forced to take to the boats, and after many days had been picked up by a British ship bound for the Cape of Good Hope.

It was two years after the burning of the East Indiaman before Mr. Denton was able to make inquiries as to the fate of his wife and child, for his sufferings while in the open boat had resulted in the temporary loss of his reason. When he did search he had found nothing. He had reluctantly abandoned hope thereafter, and had finally gone to Batavia, where he had become a successful planter.

When the news of the war between England and the United States had filtered out to those Eastern seas he had gone back to the United States and offered his services, such as they were, to that country, which still remained supreme in his affection. Now, however, it being evident that the end of the year would see the close of the war, he was returning to Batavia to look after his disordered affairs, which urgently needed attention. He was a passenger on the *Brederode*, and, as has been said, Captain Van Rooy, her master, was a personal friend of Mr. Denton's and knew his story. The American

THE *BREDERODE* TO THE RESCUE

had remained unmarried and had ever cherished the memory of that fair young wife and the baby son who had been lost.

It was chance, or shall we not say Providence? that had led the *Brederode* down to the very latitude and longitude where, years before, Mr. Denton's loved ones had been lost, and there, upon those spars she was fast overhauling, lay the unconscious body of his son, though, of course, not the faintest idea of such a thing crossed the mind of the American.

"And you found nothing about them during your visit to the States, my friend?" queried the kind-hearted little Dutchman for the hundredth time.

"Nothing. The sea seems to have swallowed them up."

"Some day you will know, though."

"Yes, some day," answered Denton, reverently; "but not in this life, I fear."

"I would not even assert that last, mynheer. I have seen the sea disclose too many mysteries to doubt the possibility of your finding your wife or your child, or at least finding out what became of them."

"You think so?" asked the American, incredulously, yet hopefully.

"I do, indeed. Remember that at sea, at any rate, it is always the unexpected that happens. Have confidence, have hope!"

"I do try, my friend, but it is hard. It is the

IN THE WASP'S NEST

uncertainty which makes it so difficult to bear, though, even after all these years."

This conversation, or one like it, had often taken place between the two men, yet each time the topic was broached they attacked it with a new interest. Meantime the *Brederode* had run down close to the raft, when, by the captain's direction, Mr. de Kaater had promptly hove her to. A boat was dropped in the water and rapidly rowed over to the raft.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE MYSTERY IS SOLVED

THE keen eyes of Captain Van Rooy detected the situation long before the boat, which had successfully taken the castaways from the raft, reached the side of the ship. At a few sharp words of command from him a couple of Dutch sailors sprang nimbly into the weather main shrouds of the *Brederode*. They ran up to the main-top, then out on the yard-arm, whence, after a few minutes of busy work, they dropped a boatswain's chair* over the side. By this time De Kaater had brought the boat skilfully alongside, right under the dangling chair.

Old Jack Lang sat in the stern-sheets of the cutter with poor little Boston held tenderly in his arms. The boy was in a wretched state; the bullet wound, the broken arm, the exhaustion and starvation, and above all the horrible thirst of the past two days, enhanced by his fevered condition, had brought him nearly to the last gasp apparently. Lieutenant De Kaater, who knew no English, stretched out his arms as if to take the moaning boy as the boat swung alongside the ship; but

* A boatswain's chair is simply a board hung like the seat of a swing in a triangle of rope; in this instance attached to a tackle rove through a block on the yard-arm.

IN THE WASP'S NEST

Lang shook his head in prompt denial. It was impossible, of course, for the old sailor, or any one else for that matter, to carry the helpless midshipman up the battens to the gangway, but the boatswain's chair which he saw dangling before him was a thing which would serve for both of them.

Watching his opportunity, with the officer's assistance, he got into the chair, still holding the boy. The men in the waist at a signal from the captain manned the fall of the girtline and ran the two lightly above the rail and then dropped them gently on the deck.

Disengaging himself slowly and painfully, for he was stiff and exhausted from what he had gone through, the old sailor found himself confronted by the fat little Dutch captain, while immediately following him was the tall figure of the American; they had both descended from the poop to the quarter-deck to meet him. Van Rooy at once addressed him in voluble Dutch, to which the mystified old man could only reply by shaking his head. At last he burst out:

"Ain't there nobody here as kin speak United States?"

"I can," promptly replied Mr. Denton, stepping forward. "Captain Van Rooy," he added in Dutch, "I suggest that they be taken to your cabin for the present at any rate."

"By all means," assented the captain, leading the way aft.

THE MYSTERY IS SOLVED

Before he disappeared under the break of the poop he turned to De Kaater, who had come on deck and attended to the bestowing of the boat :

"Swing the yards, sir, and get the ship under way and on her course once more ; we've lost a good deal of time already," he commanded.

Arrived in the roomy captain's cabin of the *Brederode*, Denton and the captain took a quick survey of the castaways. Lang was clad only in his trousers, since he had torn his shirt up to make bandages for the young officer ; his eyes were sunken, his face haggard and worn, mostly through the anxiety he felt for the midshipman rather than on account of the experiences he had gone through. A singular picture of grief and apprehension, he now stood bending over little Boston, whom he had laid upon a cushion-covered transom immediately he entered.

The midshipman was still unconscious. He was dressed in his regulation uniform except his jacket, though one of the sleeves of his shirt had been slit to make room for the splints. After he had given the boy a few sips Lang tenderly wetted his lips with water from a glass which the captain with a seaman's ready instinct had handed him immediately. If the sufferer had not been gently but firmly restrained by the sailor he would have drunk the whole glass at once. Although the old man was suffering greatly from thirst himself he would take nothing until he had attended to the wants of his

IN THE WASP'S NEST

young charge. As he looked at the helpless boy he turned appealingly to the American :

"For God's sake, sirs," he burst forth, "ain't there no doctor aboard to look arter him? Wot he's bin through's enough to kill a man a'most, let alone a lad like him."

Denton turned to Captain Van Rooy, who, by the way, understood not a little English, though he could not speak the language. As the American began to translate, the captain, anticipating, struck a bell standing on the table, and Midshipman Snyder promptly popped into the cabin.

"Send the surgeon to me at once," said Van Rooy.

As the ship's doctor came into the cabin in obedience to the summons, the American pointed to the boy. The physician swiftly and skilfully examined little Boston.

"Who put those splints on?" he asked, with admiration in his tone and glance.

Mr. Denton translated the question, and Jack Lang announced his handiwork.

"You have done very well, indeed," said the doctor, a fat little fac-simile of the captain, "and the constant wetting of the wound has in great measure kept down the inflammation. I will re-dress it, of course. The boy is suffering from nervous shock, from hunger, and especially from thirst. I shall mix a cooling draught for him, and, with proper care and nursing, we will break his fever and restore

THE MYSTERY IS SOLVED

him to his senses," he continued. "I will go to the sick bay and mix it up now, and will you have a bowl of broth made at the galley, sir?" he asked the captain.

"Certainly," replied the latter, again summoning the midshipman.

"Give him water in sips until I return, nothing more," added the doctor as he left the cabin to make up his prescription.

"Now, my man, your story?" said Mr. Denton, who had rapidly conveyed to old Jack the assurance in the doctor's words.

"Well, sir," answered the sailor, "Mr. Boston, here, was a midshipman on the United States sloop-o'-war *Wasp*, Cap'n Blakeley, w'ich she was the finest wessel of her class afloat. Not fur from these latitudes we was edgin' our way to the sou'east'ard lookin' fer British ships. I was chief bo's'n's mate on her——"

"Then you are an American?" interrupted Mr. Denton, with eagerness. "I might have known that, though," he continued, as he looked at Lang's naked breast, decorated with a rippling American flag, tattooed in its proper colors upon his white skin.

To digress, Lang was a perfect picture gallery! A full-rigged ship under all sail was racing across his back; mysterious daggers with blood dripping from the points were so cunningly tattooed as to have the appearance of being thrust through his

IN THE WASP'S NEST

arms ; anchors, stars, hearts, and women's names—indicating the proverbial fickleness of a sailor—were scattered all over him. He would have been a fortune to a dime museum, if such places had existed in those days.

"Yes, sir," he answered, promptly, "we're both Americans, born there, raised there, leastways I was. Mr. Boston, he was born on the sea I 'low—that is, he was found there."

"On the sea!" exclaimed Mr. Denton, starting. "But what nonsense," he continued to himself, a moment after ; then, addressing Jack Lang again, he said, "I am an American, too."

"Thank God fer that, sir," commented Jack, heartily.

"I do," returned the other, smiling at the man's patriotism, "but to your story."

"Well, sir, there ain't much more to tell, though a mighty sight happened. We fell in with a big British frigate in a ca'm sea, she overhauled us in the night, an' though we fit her good an' hard, she knocked us into a cocked hat. Then, in the middle of the action, a storm struck us, the wust hurricane I ever seed. We tried to scud afore it, but couldn't control her, an' she was brought-by-the-lee an' foundered! Went down with all hands on board, 'ceptin' him an' me. We was the only ones saved, by the marcy o' God, sirs, of the hull ship's company of as fine sailormen and as bully fighters as ever I was shipmates with, an' I seed some mighty fine crews

THE MYSTERY IS SOLVED

since the time me'n Cap'n Jones licked the *Serryypis*. Just him an' me is left, an' thank God fer him. He's the finest young reefer in the Navy. I picked him up in my arms as she went down an' sprung clear. We found the top-mast in the water an' you know the rest, yer honor."

"How long were you in the water?" asked Mr. Denton.

"Two nights an' one day, sir," answered Jack. "You see, sir, I was sort o'sponsible fer this young gentleman," continued the old sailor. "It was me that nussed him w'en he was a baby; poor little chap never had no mother ner a father nuther, lessen 't was me. An' he was found right out there, a matter o' fourteen years ago."

"Good God, man!" cried Denton, now thoroughly aroused. "What do you mean? Who found him?"

"Why, sir," answered the sailor, looking up in great surprise at the tall American standing near the boy with flushed face, his voice trembling with suppressed emotion, "Why, sir, we took a French ship, *Le Bersy*, er suthin' like that, in the fall of eighteen hundred, an' she had a feemale woman, a lady, on board of her, an' this yere boy, w'ich he was a babby then. The French corvette had picked up the woman an' her boy a few days afore. The woman was dead—she'd been killed by a shot from our battery, but the boy was alive, the finest little youngster you ever seed, sirs, an'——"

IN THE WASP'S NEST

"Man! man!" cried the American, unable to keep silent longer, clutching the sailor by the shoulder as he spoke, "I lost my wife and baby hereabout by the burning of an East Indiaman—*William of Nassau*—fourteen years ago. At the first alarm of fire I put both of them in a boat towing astern. In some way the painter worked loose or burned away, and the boat got adrift in the night. When I looked for them they were gone. The survivors among the crew and passengers took to the remaining boats, and the boat I was in was saved at last, but I never have heard of my wife or boy since. Can this lad be he? He looks a little like my poor wife, doesn't he?" he cried, turning beseechingly to Van Rooy.

"My friend," answered the captain, seizing the other by the hand—he had followed the sailor's story and Denton's appeal—"My dear friend, has God indeed wrought a miracle? You know I never saw the poor jungfrau Denton, but" he paused impressively and pointed to the prostrate boy—"the lad is the image of you!"

Old Jack Lang followed the pointing finger, he looked from the old face to the young face.

"Fer the love o' God!" he exclaimed, in an awe-struck voice, "he looks like ye, he's yer livin' image, yer honor!"

At this moment little Boston opened his eyes. All through this discussion Jack had faithfully continued moistening his lips and brow with the cool

THE MYSTERY IS SOLVED

water, which had greatly relieved him, and had now restored him to partial consciousness at least.

"Mother," whispered the boy, looking vacantly about the cabin in the deathlike silence with which the three men listened and looked at him, till his gaze fell upon his brave old friend whose kindly face was working with anxiety, suspense, and hope. "Jack, good old Jack," he went on slowly, but with increasing strength and sureness. "Don't worry, Jack, we'll be picked up surely soon; mother said so."

"We are picked up, Mr. Boston, sir, praised be God," answered the bo's'n's mate, fervently.

"Is that so? I'm glad," answered the other, then he asked for the locket. "That locket, Jack, I want to see her face and—thank her, you know."

As he had done on the raft the old sailor opened Ned's shirt, drew forth the chain, loosed the locket, opened it and laid it in the midshipman's hand. Mr. Denton and the captain had followed the sailor's every movement, the former with a consuming anxiety leavened by a growing hope.

"Was that locket found on the boy?" he demanded, in agonized intensity and excitement.

"On the lady, sir, an' we draw'd this yere ring from off her finger, sir," answered Lang, pointing to the ring hanging from the chain.

"'Tis my wife's picture!" cried the American, after a hasty glance, "and that is her ring, her wedding-ring, there's a text in it, 'Mizpah,' you know!

IN THE WASP'S NEST

Oh, my boy, my son!" he gasped out, sinking on his knees by the transom and laying his hand tenderly on Ned's fevered brow. "Thank God, the sea has given back a part of what it took away from me!"

"Who are you, sir?" asked little Boston, looking in wonderment at the man whose face, bending above him, was working with old grief and new joy.

"My lad, my little boy, by God's providence I believe I'm your father."

"So I have found you at last, sir," said little Boston, with a smile of deep content. "Jack, I told you we'd find—" and then he lapsed into unconsciousness again just as the doctor came in and took charge of him.

Captain Van Rooy, almost as much rejoiced as his friend over this son who had been lost and was now found again, congratulated the American most heartily on his good fortune. There was a spare stateroom off his cabin, which he insisted upon placing at the disposal of the boy; and as old Jack absolutely refused to be separated from him, for the second time in his life the boy's mate was the guest of a captain, and berthed aft with the quality!

The skilful treatment of the doctor, and the devoted nursing of the father and the sailor, who vied with one another in their attention to the patient, soon broke the fever and set him on the royal road to recovery. He became a great favorite with the other passengers on the long cruise, and they all served to make his convalescence a pleasant one.

THE MYSTERY IS SOLVED

When the *Brederode* reached Batavia he was completely well again.

It was necessary, of course, for the young midshipman, as the only surviving officer of the *Wasp*, to return to the United States as soon as possible, and report her loss to the Secretary of the Navy. Mr. Denton therefore sold his plantation and closed out his business with as little delay as possible, and the three, father, son, and sailor, returned in the following year to their native land.

The boy had been named Norman Edward Denton originally, so in his new relationship he could still be known by a part of his familiar name—"Ned." There was one person, however, who could not get used to the new name, and that was old Jack Lang. To him Ned remained "Mr. Boston," to the end of the chapter.

Peace had been declared long before the three reached the United States, and told the story of the last great battle in which the *Wasp* fought the huge unknown British frigate until she sank with Blakeley dead upon her decks and the flag which had never been struck flying above him. Mr. Denton bought property and settled in Massachusetts, near the home of Commodore Little, his boy's second father, to whom, and to Jack Lang, he felt he owed everlasting gratitude for the care and rearing which had made Ned what he was—"the finest young officer in the Navy," as the bo's'n's mate was accustomed to say.

IN THE WASP'S NEST

Ned Boston Denton, for so he insisted upon being called, divided his time between the two houses when he was not cruising in the service. Old Jack followed his fortunes for a few years longer and finally died of old age, at sea on the *Constitution* cruising to the Mediterranean. His last look and word were to the young lieutenant he loved, whom he persisted in calling Mr. Boston. His talkativeness was stopped at last. They folded his arms in that familiar way he had, lashed him in a spotless new hammock, wrapped his huge figure in the flag he had loved and fought for, and buried him in the sea which for over fifty years had been his home. He was one of the greatest of the common—or uncommon—sailors of the Navy of the United States.

Ned Denton rose to the command of many great and gallant ships, attained the rank of Commodore, and lived to do his country faithful service on many seas. His son followed General Scott in his campaign from Vera Cruz to the City of Mexico in the Mexican War, and his grandson did brilliant things under Farragut in the Mississippi River in the Civil War. We shall hear of both of these boys again perhaps.

NOTE

The truth of history demands that I should call to the attention of my young readers the melancholy fact that, after the news of the sinking of the *Avon*, which was brought home by Midshipman Geisinger in the *Atalanta*, was received, but one thing else was ever heard from the brave little *Wasp*, her gallant captain and his splendid crew.

She sailed away to the southward, and disappeared forever from the knowledge of men. No one really knows what became of her. Her fate remains a mystery. Her loss is a secret of the sea.

Men have speculated as to what happened to her, and two incidents, or alleged incidents, may account for her disappearance. There was a story current soon after the war that two British frigates chased a small American sloop-of-war under a great press of canvas in a terrific storm. The sloop suddenly disappeared in the very height of the tempest. This may have been the *Wasp*.

Another account says that a British frigate, badly shattered from a fierce night battle in a storm with a smaller enemy which blew up during the action, limped into port one day in the fall of 1814, and told the story. This again may have been the *Wasp*, if the story be true. At any rate, we know one thing. She was never surrendered; her flag was never struck, and if she went down, she sank with her colors flying.

Years after her disappearance, the friends of the two officers of the *Essex*, searching unremittingly for them, found the log-book of the Swedish brig which told how they had been trans-shipped to the *Wasp*, as has been told in the story. That was the last real authentic news ever received about her.

The people at home waited long for tidings—they never

IN THE WASP'S NEST

received any. They did not give up hope for many years, but they had to abandon it at last. The *Wasp* was gone, and gone forever. With her dauntless young captain, with her dashing, splendid crew, with her brave officers, with her light-hearted midshipmen, with her traditions of glory and honor and success, ay, with the flag of her country at her gaff end, she rests beneath the seas.

C. T. B.



LM BBC
J23C79

BIEU
AEJ



from the
books of
J. M.
Henson Co.
New York
A. C. 1913

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A 000 766 727 2

